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OUGHT WE TO VISIT HER?

BY

MRS. EDWARDES,

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OUGHT WE TO VISIT HER?

CHAPTER I.

Those dear Herveys.

FOR he can no longer hide from himself in what position he stands. If he did not realise the truth before, this sweetness of reconciliation, this hour and a half spent at Jane's side, have brought him to see it in its very nakedness at last. As much mad passionate devotion as his nature is capable of he, Emma Marsland's lover, is lavishing upon a woman the tips of whose fingers he will never be allowed to kiss while he lives. Now, what does honour at a pass like this bid him do?

"All engagements may be broken, if one has moral courage—moral courage, and means sufficient to pay the forfeit-money."

Has he such moral courage and such means? Courage to break the heart of a good and amiable girl who, until she became his betrothed wife, was his sister and best friend; means to pay the forfeit (not the loss of Emma's fortune, let me do Rawdon justice, this is the lightest of his considerations): the forfeit of

self-respect, of credit before his own family and before the world, which breach of faith so flagrant must entail?

Well, then, shall he tell the truth, the absolute, honourable, ridiculous truth, and let Emma deal with the future of both as she chooses? "I thought I loved you, my dear Emma," such a confession must run. "I was sure, at all events, that it was my mamma's wish we should marry; and as you have thirty thousand pounds, and as I knew that you had long ago bestowed your affections upon me, I proposed. And on the day you accepted me, my dear, I fell in love with some one else—needless, I believe, to mention her name—and have been stealthily seeing her and falling deeper and deeper in love ever since. She laughs in my face; was good enough, a few days ago, to tell me that her heart was not in her own keeping, and I think this has had the effect of rendering my passion for her a little the stronger. The possession of a torn glove, of a faded flower that she has worn, renders me happier than would the gift, my dear Emma, of your hand and of all the substantial blessings your hand would bring with it. However, as I am trying to act like a man of honour, you see, I tell you the truth. Do with me, decide for me, as you think best."

If he said this to Emma Marsland—nay, if he embodied the spirit of this in terms of the nicest circumlocution and delicacy—he would be a brute; and if he continues to tread the path wherein he finds himself at present, he will be a scoundrel. And . . . the cab

turns with a jerk round the corner by Devonshire House into Bolton Row, just at this point of his meditations . . . and what the dickens, thinks Rawdon, descending suddenly from theory to practice, what the dickens can he say, short of absolute falsehood, that shall account to poor Emmy for his desertion of the family dinner-party and the family theatre-going to-night?

He stops at number one hundred and five, and, bidding the cabman wait for him, runs up the steps and gives a knock, whose loudness and decision are in a direct inverse ratio to his actual frame of mind. Number one hundred and five, Bolton Row, is a lodging house, but a lodging-house of the most private and elegant kind; the master of which, Mr. Maurice, after two o'clock in the day, transforms himself into a stately and imposing looking family butler. Mr. Maurice has been in the confidence of the Hervey family during the last half century: needless to say that he knows all about the impending marriage between Rawdon Crosbie and Miss Marsland. "I am to discharge the cab, Mr. Rawdon?" This with a glance at Rawdon's morning coat, as Mr. Maurice, dignified and in full dress, stands on the summit of his own door-steps.

"No," answers Rawdon, shortly; "the cab will wait. My mother is at home, Maurice?"

"The ladies are in the drawing-room, dressed for dinner, sir."

And up the stairs walks Maurice, a model of all the respectabilities, in his patent shoes and black suit;

Mr. Rawdon, in his disreputable Oxford mixture, and with conscience to match, following.

He is ushered into the drawing-room, and for a moment, sees neither Emma nor Mrs. Crosbie: sees only towering pyramids of silver-gray moiré, held aloft by a much grander-looking young gentleman than himself, whose insignia of office, a yard-measure, lies, with laces, ribbons, and other adjuncts of female dress, on an adjacent table.

"Rawdon, at last," says Mrs. Crosbie, advancing and giving her son three fingers, but too engrossed in the thrilling perplexities of millinery to notice whether he is in orthodox sables or not. "Take care where you step, Rawdon. You find us in the middle of a most important matter. Yes," addressing herself to the shopman, "I am *almost* sure the moiré is not the right shade. I am thankful I saw it at home before having it cut. At a little distance it might be taken for dirty white. Emma, my dear, you are nearest to Mrs. Hervey; ask if she does not think the dress, especially for the occasion, will have too much the appearance of dirty white?"

Emma, who is looking rather less attractive than usual, in ribbons of the wrong colour, stoops, on this, to a very handsome, very deaf old lady in an arm-chair, and shouts out the desired question: "Does Mrs. Hervey not think, when the moiré is made up, and considering the occasion it is wanted for"—here a meaning smile is furtively addressed by poor Emmy

to Rawdon—"that it will have rather too much the look of a dirty white?"

"Considering what occasion?" says the old lady, raising her eyelids about the eighth of an inch. "Lower your voice, my dear Miss Marsland, and I shall understand; I never can hear when people speak so loud."

Old Mrs. Hervey is one of the most marvellous specimens of antique beauty ever seen. She is a Hervey by blood—it is an hereditary custom among this people to intermarry—and has the typical family face. A delicate, longish nose, that, if it only stood out sufficiently, would be a noble one; a mouth whose thin lips, even in extreme old age, keep their high-bred, scornful curves! a complexion of marble, discoloured merely, not seamed, by age; eyebrows elevated, as though in pity of the rest of the world for not being Herveys; long-cut eyes, cold and black as jet, and the "Hervey eyelids." Her dress is of pearl-coloured satin; Elizabethan ruffles of softest lace are round her throat, and unwrinkled jewelled old hands; above her forehead ascends such a structure of snow-white hair—the most expensive colour in the world, by the way—and yellowish Mechlin, as Vandyke would have loved to paint. A marvellous specimen of antique beauty, preserved as only the antiseptic virtues of a cold heart could preserve any creature for more than seventy years, and likely to last another decade or so with ease.

What shall kill a woman who has been strong enough to outlive youth and love, joy and sorrow, all

hopes and all regrets? The friends and lovers of Mrs. Hervey's youth, her husband, her blooming sons and daughters (of whom only one wreck remains), all these were gone from her, hushed in the mould, long ages ago. And Mrs. Hervey not only lives on, but enjoys life; think of that, reader, of twenty-five—enjoys life still! Divides her time between Bath, Cheltenham, and London; plays short whist with just as wholesome a gusto as erewhile she played long; goes to the theatres of the day to see French actresses and English breakdowns, as once she went to see Siddons and Kemble in their prime; lives in the world, and keeps the world's pace still. A wise old philosopher, who conquers time by accommodating herself to time's changes—just that. This gift of long living would probably, if we understood it better, turn out to be only the gift of superior pliability. Mrs. Hervey has seen all fashions, in manners, art, dress, morals, and has conformed herself to each in its turn. When she was born, George the Third and good Queen Charlotte had long been holding their model court of dull decorum and strictest domestic fidelity. Her early youth was spent under the influence of the regency! Then, by the time she was middle-aged, had come a turn in the kaleidoscope, and the bits of glass were back in the old George the Third or courtly domestic pattern. And now, here we all are wearing high heels to our shoes again; and requiring high-rouged pleasures; and abjuring domesticity; and going, by way of æsthetic entertainment, to see Mademoiselle Boulotte!

Mrs. Hervey has known virtue to be in vogue and vice at a discount and again vice regnant and virtue nowhere, not once, but a good many times during her life; the change recurring indeed, almost with as periodic regularity as large bonnets and small ones. And she has been a citizeness of the world, loyally following the world's current always.

At her request, a box has been taken for the French plays to-night.

"Boulotte is really an amusing creature," says Mrs. Hervey; "and as the play is in another language we need understand no more about her than we think fit. We are sure of a better audience there than at any theatre in town; all the best people go to have a look at Boulotte, and a good audience is what a little country mouse like Miss Marsland should be taken to see."

It is some minutes before Rawdon, nervously watching the clock upon the mantelpiece, can get a chance of speaking. The silver-gray *moiré*—so a whisper from Emma informs him—is to be "mamma's wedding-dress—I mean the dress worn by mamma at our wedding." And, having firmly resolved to become the possessor of this *moiré*, Mrs. Crosbie rings every disparaging change that she can think of with respect to it into the ears of the long suffering silken-tongued shopman. It will certainly look too much like dirty white for a bridal occasion. The water is not large enough. Every here and there—yes, but Mrs. Crosbie is certain of it—every here and there you can see a

decided unevenness in the cord. Emma joins in chorus. The silken-tongued shopman explains; the ladies return to the charge; retire; make a feint of withdrawing wholly from the bargain; at last get the dress, "as it is the close of the season, not from any flaw in the article," for two guineas less than its original price. And then come the ribbons and the laces, and the trimmings; all of which must be had at close-of-the-season prices too.

Sick, and disgusted at heart, boiling over with impatience he dare not show, young Rawdon listens. Oh, the paltriness, he thinks, the vulgarity, the sordid smallness of all this huckstering! Unless women wish to make the men to whom they belong despise them utterly, never should they suffer them to be present at these sorts of commercial transactions. Why Helen herself would have lost half her lovers could her lovers have heard her haggling, an hour at a time, with a smirking man-milliner, over silk dresses and ribbons! But then men-milliners belong to such a much more advanced stage of civilisation than Helen's!

At last it is over. The grandly-dressed young gentleman gathers up his remaining wares, and bows himself backwards from the room. And Rawdon, lashed by this time into a very fever of impatience, may speak.

"I'm extremely sorry, Emma, but your note did not come soon enough. I am engaged for to-night."

"Engaged!" cries Emma, dismally. "Oh, Rawdon, how horrid of you! Oh, mamma, what shall we do?"

"Thirteen guineas for fifteen yards and a half," says Mrs. Crosbie, holding the dress between her shapely fingers, and looking up dreamily at the ceiling; "that comes to less than eighteen shillings a yard. There can be no doubt of it, Emmy, silks are to be got cheaper in Tottenham Court Road than at the west-end shops. And if one has the *credit* of always dealing at Howell and James's," adds Mrs. Crosbie, "who can say where any particular thing comes from? Rawdon, I trust you admire the dress in which I mean to do honour to a certain great occasion?"

"I don't know which to admire most, mother," answers Rawdon, "the dress, or the principles of economy you displayed in buying it. I hope the bride-cake and favours are to be bargained for in the same praiseworthy spirit?"

The bride-cake and favours! Yes; his projects of truth-telling, of paying forfeit, should honour bid him do so, have come to this already. Chafed in temper, wearied in spirit, though Rawdon Crosbie may be, the sight, the very rustle of these wedding garments, seem (boy that he is still at heart) to have irrevocably sealed his doom! Half an hour ago reprieve might have been possible. He can hear the "never, never," sounding from every fold of the gray moiré, held, like the web of fate, between his mother's hands . . . The more reason, thinks Rawdon, with another glance at the clock, to make the most of this dwindling span of liberty that is still his; of this evening, this whole, in-

toxicating, unlawful, most delightful evening, from half-past seven till twelve, that he is to pass at Jane's side!

There is silence after his little question about the bride-cake and favours; silence relieved after a few moments by a deprecating "ahem" from behind Mrs. Hervey's easy chair.

"After the breaking off of Miss Copplestone's marriage," says a Hervey voice, "after the breaking off of Adelina Copplestone's marriage with the Hon. Charles Gascoigne, I remember the cake was put up for sale in the window of the chief confectioner at Harrowgate. It was thought rather bad taste on the part of the Copplestone family; still, as dear old Lady Copplestone said, 'What is the use of a wedding-cake except at a wedding?' And a doctor, or a solicitor, or some such person, eventually bought it, at cost price, on the occasion of his daughter's marriage."

Old Mrs. Hervey opens her eyes, which have been closed ever since she gave her final opinion on the silver-gray moiré:

"What in the world are you talking about, Maria? You speak more unintelligibly every day. Repeat your observation, pray, and distinctly. It drives me distracted to hear people mumbling their words, as if they were ashamed of them."

Upon this, the narrative has to be repeated, vociferated syllable by syllable, into the old lady's ear.

"Who are the Copplestones, and where is the point?" is her chilling commentary. "Don't get into

the habit of telling pointless stories, my good Maria. Life is quite tedious enough already, without that."

"My good Maria" is old Mrs. Hervey's unpaid white slave, or companion, and another Hervey. She is a young lady of dim and shadowy age, who, until a few years ago, haunted the ball-room walls of one of our inland watering towns with mournful tenacity, and from whose heart a solitary matrimonial hope has not yet fled. Tall, and waspish of figure, acid of expression, sallow with the sallowness engendered by a life to which exercise and fresh air are alike unknown, my good Maria has certainly not her share of the family looks. She will tell you confidentially that she had eyelashes, complexion, animation, once; but adds, with pathetic truthfulness, that she lost them all—after measles. And old Mrs. Hervey will not allow her to patch up deficiencies by art. "In our position, my good Maria, the less we try to attract the attention of others, the better taste we shall show." As a consequence, Maria's face is like her whole, flat, disappointed, colourless existence—a blank.

She is the most useful Companion to Polite Society, or Addenda to the Peerage extant; old Mrs. Hervey knows that no money could ever refill her good Maria's place, did she lose her: has the nobility by heart, and is a positive new edition, with notes, of 'The Landed Gentry of Great Britain and Ireland.' 'Who's Who?' is no mystery to Maria Hervey. She can tell you to a nicety where everybody was born, and where their grand-father was buried, and the

exact date when plebeian blood from the veins of a "solicitor, or doctor, or some such person," first made its way into the family. Especially are the marriages and burials of defunct Herveys her glory and delight. With her own fair fingers she has drawn out a miraculously minute and wide-spreading genealogical record, showing forth all the noble families who, from the time of Edward the Sixth downwards, have contracted alliances with her ancestors. She etches little pen-and-ink bits of architecture on card (mostly constructed on the principle of the famous leaning towers of Bologna), and presents them to strangers, as the tombs or birthplaces of the Herveys. She knows English history well, in as far as it forms a framework or back-ground to Hervey existence; can tell you accurately at what siege one of her forefathers devoured his own leathern doublet, and at what battle another, both arms shot away, managed to get his bridle round his neck, and thrice shouting "*Pour y parvenir!*" the family motto, rushed on, followed by every Hervey on the field, to a glorious martyrdom.

"An invaluable dictionary of reference, though somewhat badly bound," Mrs. Hervey says of her in her pleasant, cruel way. To be ill-favoured in person is, in the old lady's eyes, the worst crime a woman and a Hervey can commit. "If my good Maria married, it would positively take a library to replace her. Happily, there is little chance of that."

Between Maria and Rawdon Crosbie there has

long existed bitter blood; on Maria's side at least. When Rawdon was a small boy he once sent Miss Hervey a valentine, drawn by himself, in which occurred a richly illuminated device of a Hervey swimming towards the Ark after the deluge, with the family pedigree between his teeth. And Maria never could get over the affront. She spits forth a little mild venom at him now.

"Rawdon spoke of bargaining for the bride cake and favours, ma'am. I mentioned the Copplestones, to show that there may be extraordinary instances of such things going cheap. Adelina Copplestone was an heiress," adds Maria, with spiteful retrospection, "and changed her mind about the Hon. Charles Gascoigne *quite* at the last, Rawdon."

"And did the Hon. Charles drown himself, Maria?" Rawdon asks. "You know how interested I am in every detail connected with the aristocracy."

Before Maria can answer, Mrs. Crosbie, waking at length from the contemplation of her *moiré*, remarks that her son is not in evening dress. Is Rawdon aware that in another five minutes dinner will be on the table?

And now, his mother asking him questions, the eyes of Emma, of old Mrs. Hervey, of Maria, all fixed upon him, Rawdon must put his defalcation in the best light he can. If Emmy's note had come one post earlier—an engagement to dine with an old academy chum—starting for China next week—an engagement there is *no* getting out of. He meant to say a simple, honest "no," and started by saying it. Before he

knows where he is, he finds himself drawn on into half a dozen small white lies; very small, very white ones; but that are lies notwithstanding, and that, sooner than he wots of, may rise up in judgment against him.

"Whatever pleases you, pleases us," cries Emma, doing her best to be dignified and cool. "Fortunately, we are not left quite without an escort. Fortunately, Major Hervey has not thrown us over at the last."

A loud double-knock comes at the house door at this very moment. "There is Alfred," says the old lady, raising her eyelids by about the sixth of an inch. "Punctual to the moment, as usual. You young men of the new school, Rawdon—Miss Marsland, you allow me to lecture, I hope?—might take an example in punctuality from Alfred."

Rawdon, who wants neither examples nor lectures, either, just at present, takes his leave with all the haste he can; and closely following his departure, Major Hervey, Alfred Hervey, the celebrated Adonis and flower of all the Herveys, is ushered with ceremony by Mr. Maurice into the drawing-room.

Adonis is a small, very well-made man, who dresses, and pads, and dyes for thirty-eight, and is in reality slightly over fifty; like his mother, but with every peculiarity of the Hervey face accentuated—the contemptuous eyebrows more upraised, the lids more drooping, the delicate greyhound nose flatter to the face. Not a handsome man, above all in profile; and yet one who, if only a fraction of his own modest hints are to be believed, has proved more destructive

to women's hearts and to the domestic peace of households than any acknowledged beauty man in London.

No one knows how or why Alfred Hervey was first christened Adonis. I believe that he, himself, originated and stood sponsor for the name in the first instance, and that society at large adopted it as a covert weapon of ridicule afterwards. But the Hervey construction of intellect would never allow any member of the family to realise the possibility of his or her being ridiculed.

"These sobriquets are a sort of heirloom with us," says Adonis, pulling down his long purple-black whiskers, and giving you a supercilious stare from under his heavy eyelids. "Recollect the celebrated handsome Hervey—time of George the First? Not our branch of the family—came over three hundred years before they were heard of— Still, the Hervey name—aw;" all Major Hervey's speeches "um" and "aw" themselves into nonentity before he has done with them—"the Hervey family. This kind of sobriquet—er—quite an heirloom in the family."

He advances to his mother and goes through the form of imprinting a salute upon her white old cheek. Then, having languidly bestowed his small gloved hand upon Mrs. Crosbie (and a forefinger upon Maria), on his way, comes to Emma's side; poor little Emma, who from behind the window-curtain has been watching the hansom that bore Rawdon away, and at the present moment is trying with all the fortitude she possesses to keep herself from tears.

Adonis expresses his happiness at finding the heiress alone. He whispers, so close that his whiskers tickle her ear, that she never before looked so charming. He makes her feel, without uttering Rawdon Crosbie's name, that her lover is a monster of cruelty and bad taste for having left her.

"I suppose you know, then, that Rawdon has deserted us for good?" cries Emma. "I suppose you know that we are thrown altogether upon your tender mercies, Major Hervey?"

"Rawdon rushed past me—an avalanche, upon my word, an avalanche—on the stairs," says the beau. "His pace and size" (Adonis has an irrepressible dislike for men a head and shoulders taller than himself,) "his pace and size—er—made me retreat as far as possible, but I presumed, en passant, from Rawdon's appearance, that he could scarcely be thinking of spending the evening in the society—aw—of ladies."

"And so we have no one to take care of us but you. Think of that, Major Hervey," says Emma, piteously. "Four forlorn ladies all under your charge."

Old Mrs. Hervey, whose power of hearing is curiously capricious, turns her head round, on this, towards her son and Emma.

"What is that you are saying, Miss Marsland?" she asks, in her silvery, well-bred, insincere old treble. "Four ladies under Alfred's charge! In virtue of my preadamite age you reckon me as two, I conclude?"

Emma answers that Rawdon's place—with a little

tremble of the voice, this—Rawdon's place being left vacant, she imagined Maria would like to occupy it.

"You are very obliging, my dear," says the old lady, calmly; "very obliging, but I think not. Our good Maria has letters to write this evening."

Our good Maria, used though she is to being left at home on every occasion when her services are not absolutely wanted, bites her lips, and colours.

"I think I should like to go to the theatre this once," she says, faintly, and gives a glance towards her one hope in existence—Major Hervey.

"Five people are a wrong number for any box," answers Adonis, with cold-blooded promptness. "Even with four—impossible for every one to see the stage."

"But I don't care for seeing the stage. I prefer a back place. I prefer——"

"My good Maria," says the old lady, suavely, "let us have no discussion. You have your letters to write, and we will tell you to-morrow morning what we think of Mademoiselle Boulotte."

So it is settled. They go down to dinner in old Mrs. Hervey's parlour, which she kindly lends to her relations during their stay in town, as a dining-room. Mrs. Crosbie, that is to say, orders the daily dinner (and pays for it), and the old lady and Maria are saved the trouble of ordering theirs. The Herveys have a perfect genius for doing kindnesses of this unostentatious sort to their friends.

Emma is placed next to Adonis, and by the time dinner is over has almost ceased to regret young Raw-

don's absence. She loves Rawdon Crosbie, heart and soul; loves him as youth loves youth. But the flatteries, the tender whispers of the hardened old heiress-hunter at her side, do not fall altogether powerless on her ear. Long ago, before it was at all a settled thing that she was to be Rawdon's wife, Emma, in her inmost heart, knew that if she chose she might be Major Hervey's; I think, had decided that such a fate would be endurable. Such love as she felt for Rawdon she could, of course, never feel for this elderly Adonis; but she admired him, took him at his own valuation, said to herself that even Rawdon would be improved could he only adopt the finished dress, the Grandisonian manner, the exquisite refinement of style of Major Hervey. "Wherever Adonis goes people look at him, and every one knows him, and he knows every one, and it makes one feel like Somebody to be with him." To many a plain little country girl, as well as Emma Marsland, these are powerful attractions for a man who lays himself at *her* feet to possess.

By the time dinner is over, Emmy has got over her disappointment at her lover's absence; by the time they are leaving their box at the theatre has almost forgotten the existence of any other man in the world but Major Hervey. The house, as old Mrs. Hervey foretold, is crowded with the best people in London, from royalty downwards. Bows and smiles of recognition come to Adonis from every side. He points out to Emma's dazzled gaze lords, ladies, foreign ambassadors, two cabinet ministers, and a dean in disguise,

all looking delighted with the vivacities of Mademoiselle Boulotte. Poor Rawdon! sacrificing himself at the dull altar of friendship with that academy chum of his who is bound for China! Emma cannot but feel some twinges of remorse as she thinks of him, and reflects upon her own enjoyment, her own readiness to be consoled by other society in his absence.

When they are leaving the theatre old Mrs. Hervey declares herself ready for supper. (Think, Reader, of the constitution such a declaration implies! After seventy years' eating and drinking, to be able to dine at six and cry out for supper at eleven!) "You young people have grown too delicate, or dine too late to care about supper," she remarks. "In my day we would have given nothing for Siddons herself unless we had supped afterwards. What do you say, Miss Marsland? Shall Alfred take us somewhere—I suppose such places exist—where we can have another hour of each other's society and a chicken salad as well?"

Emma, seldom averse, as we have seen, to the pleasures of the table, gives an animated "Yes" to this proposal; and Adonis is called upon to think of some restaurant to which ladies, at this hour of the night, may *with propriety*—the parenthesis from Mrs. Crosbie—be taken for refreshment.

He answers, with withered playfulness, that he considers—upon his soul, he considers his mother the fastest débutante of the season. At this hour of the night where may ladies be taken without impropriety?

"Well, really," Adonis asks, "where may ladies

nowadays not be taken without impropriety? You know, there's that corner place close to the Haymarket—Wilmot's—Wilcocks's—what the deuce is the name of it? Corner place . . . where you are not inordinately poisoned, for an English restaurant. . . . Wilcocks's, of course, it is. Liable to mixed company—actresses, and that sort of thing; still, every one goes to Wilcocks's—every one. Major Hervey's particular friend, the Marchioness of Veriphast, and her cousin, Lady Carolina, were there together only the other night—and the best of the joke was, poor Lady Carolina ran across her own husband—had it from the Marchioness herself."

"Well, wherever such distinguished examples lead, we, surely, may follow," says the old lady, gaily. Mrs. Hervey is really the liveliest companion imaginable to go about London with! Has always, stupidly, left her purse behind her (a family trick of forgetfulness observable in Adonis also); but, except as regards the payment of money, ready and full of spirit for everything. "Now, what do you say, Juliana; may we venture with safety?"

And Mrs. Crosbie, the still small voice drowned, I fear, in the music of that delicious word "Marchioness," has not strength of mind to say "No."

So to the corner place near the Haymarket, where you are not inordinately poisoned, but where actresses, and that sort of thing may have to be encountered, the coachman of the mock-private Hervey and Crosbie brougham is ordered to proceed.

CHAPTER II.

A Midnight Meeting.

AND Rawdon? Driving back, as quickly as a well-bribed cabby can drive him, to his hotel, Rawdon orders some food, rushes up to dress, swallows a beef-steak, tough and gory as a British steak should be, and arrives at the Theobalds' lodgings in Maddox Street exactly a quarter of an hour behind the appointed time.

When the door opens the two ladies are in the act of descending the stairs. Jane is simply dressed in white, no ornaments in her brown hair, a bouquet of flowers, fresh from Covent Garden this morning, in her hand. Miss Minnie Arundel is a vision of grandeur awful to behold; hair raised in elaborate pyramids at the back; hair descending in fluffy clouds to the eyebrows; a satin train; a panier, trimmed with tulles and laces; rouge; pearl-powder; a strong odour of Guards Bouquet; a laced pocket handkerchief; a pair of costly opera-glasses, and a fan. It is a theory of Min's that if you hide handsome presents under a bushel you may just as well never get handsome presents at all. (Not an incorrect theory, surely; see the court newspaper, if you would learn how even the brides of refined society display *their* trophies to an admiring world.) And to-night, with some covert design, per-

haps, of bewildering Rawdon's infantine mind, she has literally hung herself round with spoils.

How can so much grandeur ever be compressed within the narrow limits of a four-wheeler? Jane gets in first; Miss Arundel follows; the cab is more than full; laces, tulles and ribbons puff forth through the open windows on either side.

"And I'll go on the box," says Rawdon, as he stands, his opera-hat under his arm, his slim, six-foot figure very upright, on the pavement.

"Indeed, you'll do nothing of the kind," cries Jane. "I felt a drop of rain on my face as we came out. You must get as close to me as you can, and we'll let Min have a whole side to herself and her finery."

Rawdon, not very reluctantly, obeys; the cabman shuts the door with a bang, and off they start. Perfumed clouds of gauzy material pervade the whole cab, settle on the young artilleryman's knees, ascend and touch his chin: he can scarce get a glimpse of the poor little happy over-rouged, over-dressed woman opposite, to whom they belong.

"We were just beginning to think what we should do if you didn't come," she cries—shrieks, rather, in vain efforts to outvoice the rattling of the cab. "What made you late? Did the extremely serious family enter objections at the last?"

"Why, Min, you little goose!" says Jane, "the serious family are all safe down in Chalkshire. Do you think Rawdon would dare be dancing attendance

upon you and me if his lawful owners were in London."

And Rawdon volunteers no explanation. Oh, what spirits he is in! How thoroughly he enjoys his drive with Jane and her sister in this dingy four-wheeler, and through unfashionable London streets, redolent of the dust and heat, and closeness, normal to London streets of a July evening! Min loses her fan, her opera-glasses, the order for the theatre, before they have gone a hundred yards; and Rawdon must help her to search for each in its turn. And the fan is found hanging on her wrist, and the opera-glasses—how in the world did they get there?—are in Rawdon's hand, and the order is inside her own glove. And then how they both laugh, as if they had been saying or doing something wonderfully witty, over each discovery!

"I'm sure I hope you are going to behave yourselves like rational beings at last," says Jane, when they are entering the theatre. "Rawdon give Min your arm, and lead the way—oh! but I wish it, please. Just as if I would take our *only beau* away from Min!"

And so they proceed to the stalls. Here Miss Arundel draws back for her sister, who, as a married lady, enters and takes her place first. The natural consequence of this is, that Rawdon, following last, is divided, during the whole of the evening, from Mrs. Theobald.

He feels certain that the arrangement was preconcerted between the sisters; turns furious; turns sulky.

Then resolving to show that he, in his turn, can be indifferent, begins to flirt with all his might with Miss Minnie Arundel.

This is exactly the object for which Jane invited him to accompany them. Poor old Min must be amused! She looks round at him with one of her friendliest smiles, leans over, and whispers, that unless they behave better she shall feel it her duty—her positive duty, “as a friend of Mr. Crosbie’s family” to divide them. And Rawdon’s ill-temper flies.

Jane in her simple dress, looks doubly fair to him, contrasted with the marvels of hairdressing and millinery presented by her sister. Amidst the mingled odours of Miss Arundel’s laced handkerchief and of the dainty pink playbills with which the stalls are rustling, Rawdon can detect—or, the same thing, imagines he can detect—the faint country smell of the flowers in her hand. He whispers, flirts, looks tenderly into Miss Arundel’s black eyes. But Miss Arundel is not here at all! And the theatre, and the soft-playing orchestra, and the well-dressed people, and the pink play-bills, are not real. And he stands with Jane alone, as he stood in the starlight at Spa, or in the silent old garden at Theobalds. She listens to his pleading at last. There is no Francis Theobald, no Emma Marsland, in the world, and . . .

“You are talking great rubbish,” says Miss Arundel, coquettishly, in answer to one of his most high-flown compliments. “Who would have thought a child

of your age had learnt the ways of this wicked world already?"

Well, the evening passes only too quickly, and although he does not speak a dozen words to Jane, proves certainly one of the red-letter evenings of Rawdon Crosbie's life. "Excellent company to be at a play with" is Miss Minnie Arundel. She is the humblest of all humble actresses herself; but not a point, not a delicate shade in the acting of artists gifted with superior powers to her own, is lost upon her. And Rawdon, quick to see as others see, to feel as others feel, enjoys with her enjoyment. A pleasant and appreciative companion; a cool, softly-lit theatre; a luxurious stall; the perfect representation of the most perfect love-story ever put upon the stage, and the presence, divided from her though he may be, that constitutes the whole world to his foolish boy's heart . . . What happier evening is Rawdon Crosbie ever likely to know?

When it is over, and they are leaving the theatre, the question of supper arises (as in another case we know of), or rather the question of where they shall sup—supper being looked upon as a matter of course by Miss Minnie Arundel.

She proposes one or two rather well-known places of popular entertainment, but at each proposal Jane shakes her head.

"I haven't much belief in your recommendations, Min, and I don't want to take this poor child any-

where outrageously fast. Rawdon and I have characters to lose remember."

"Oh, I don't know anything about characters," cries Min, with her hearty laugh. "The question that concerns me is, where can we get the best supper and the most amusement. Of course, if we wanted to do the thing in style, and"—with a glance at Rawdon—"if expense was no object, we ought to go to Wilcocks's. Wilcocks's is a tip-top place close to the Haymarket," Miss Arundel hastens to explain; "a place where you see the very heaviest swells. The last time I supped there, I and Blanche Bolingbroke, we had little Fred Ramsay with us. Fred has got the aristocracy at his fingers' ends, you know; and I can tell you he pointed out two ladies of rank and title in the rooms at the same time."

"Then by all means let us go to Wilcocks's at once," says Rawdon. "How can we tell, if we are very lucky, that we may not see some ladies of rank and title, too? Only, unfortunately, we shall have no one to point them out."

"Except Charles, the head waiter," says Min, in all simplicity. "He's an old friend of mine; I knew him well when he was in the restaurant at the Crystal Palace; Charles knows almost as many of the swells by sight as Fred Ramsay himself."

And a minute or two later, Rawdon having hailed and piloted the ladies to a cab, to Wilcocks's they drive.

They are early, not having waited for the after-

piece at the Prince of Wales's, and find the rooms nearly empty. Min, who is evidently quite at home with the establishment and the people belonging to it, points out a little marble table in the corner immediately facing the entrance as one of the most desirable in the rooms. "You are cool there, close by the ferns and fountain, and out of the way, and have the advantage of seeing all the company as they pass in and out." And accordingly at this table—fatal little marble table, when will Rawdon forget it?—they take their places and prepare to look over the carte.

At Rawdon's request, Miss Arundel undertakes to preside at the entertainment; and this, Reader, is the barbaric bill of fare selected by her:

Fried kidneys—Min knows nothing about gastronomic laws of sequence, but orders things pell-mell, just as they strike her fancy—fried kidneys; sausages; cold duck; fried potatoes; cherry tart, and cream; Stilton cheese, pulled bread, radishes. And champagne to begin, continue, and finish the repast with.

Barbaric, but not unappetising; and Rawdon, after his wretched dinner, is hungry, and the ladies, who dined early, are hungrier still; and they all sup, not fashionably, dallying with a fork and bit of bread over a mayonnaise, but with a will.

The viands are good; the champagne, if not of the very choicest brand, is sparkling, sweet, and heady. By the time the stage of cherry tart is reached they are all in the highest spirits, and making, I will not say more noise, but more open demonstration of light-

heartedness, than the finest breeding might, perhaps, approve of in a public supper-room.

However, there is no one present to be shocked. The ladies of rank and title have, it would seem, gone elsewhere to-night. There is certainly no outward sign of their presence among the company at Wilcocks's.

"You told us we should be sure of a good supper here, Miss Arundel," says Rawdon, "and we are having a most excellent one. But where are the heavy swells? What a pity your friend with the aristocracy at his fingers' ends is not here. He might tell us whether we are supping among common people like ourselves, or dukes and marchionesses in disguise."

"The aristocracy will come by-and-by in crowds," says the little actress, jealous for the reputation of Wilcocks's. "At this moment I can see ladies in opera cloaks, getting out of a private carriage." Min is so placed as to command a view of the pavement outside the restaurant. "Yes, here we are, in great form—black velvet and marabout feathers, scarlet hair, and scarlet ribbons; venerable old party in point lace; oppressively fine gentleman, with Dundreary whiskers. The heavy swells are coming in earnest at last."

"Better late than never," remarks Rawdon, cheerily. Have I not said that the champagne has taken favourable effect on the spirits of them all? And, leaning back in his chair, he turns, in order to get a fuller view of the new arrivals.

They enter in a group of four. Little Major Hervey

first, in finished evening dress, with eyelids drooping, with his long flat nose in the air, his opera-hat under one arm, Mrs. Crosbie, affable, yet slightly rigid of demeanour, as though prepared for contingencies, upon the other; Emma and old Mrs. Hervey follow behind.

“Well! they *are* queer-looking samples, I must say,” cries Min, when she has examined them critically. “Unless Wilcocks gets better specimens of the aristocracy than that I shall take my patronage elsewhere. Have some sweets, my dear boy?” liberally piling up the plate of the unhappy young gunner with cherry tart and cream. “Oh, nonsense, about having done. You must be in love, as well as engaged, if you can’t eat. I want you to keep me in countenance. Jenny, my dear, pass over the champagne—the evening is only just beginning.”

Only just beginning! A chill of horror passed through Rawdon Crosbie’s suddenly-sobered veins at the thought.

CHAPTER III.

With doubtful Associates.

A WAITER bows the newcomers forward to one of the centre tables. They take their places; Major Hervey—scanning the carte at arm's length, and with uplifted eyebrows—orders one or two of the dishes “that we may hope will be least likely to poison us; with wine, whatever it is, that is sure to poison us!” and then the ladies begin to look a little about them at the surrounding company.

“I trust Alfred has done right in allowing us to come here,” whispers Mrs. Crosbie to old Mrs. Hervey, who generally manages to get back her sense of hearing in public places. “Do you really think all these . . . *persons* look correct?”

“In the present day, my dear,” answers the old lady cheerfully, “it is quite impossible to say who is correct and who is incorrect. There used to be a costume for the members of each world, but fashion has changed; class trenches upon class more and more, and we must go with the times. I hope they will serve us with a tolerable mayonnaise. I protest Mademoiselle Boulotte has given me quite an appetite.”

But Mrs. Crosbie, at once less of an optimist and less of a cynic than the older woman, is not so easily made comfortable. If she could but be assured of the

presence of a marchioness, a Lady Carolina, nay, even of a plain knight's wife, in these heated flaring supper-rooms, she would be satisfied. For it is not so much evil itself, evil in the abstract, as the fear of doing what no one else does, of being seen where no one else is seen, that ever lies with heaviest weight on Mrs. Crosbie's conscience.

"I wish Rawdon had come with us," she remarks, leaning forward, and addressing Major Hervey, who is with Emma upon the other side of the table. "I am sure at these sorts of doubtful places one cannot have too strong an escort of gentlemen."

"Oh, mamma, I think we are getting on delightfully!" cries Emma. Major Hervey is unfastening the heiress's glove, and either his elderly eyes do not see very clear, or some peculiarity about the button-hole causes the process to be unusually slow. "If Rawdon chose to have a stupid engagement elsewhere, why—why—"

The words die on her lips; her face turns to a sickly pallor, then crimson. "Why, there is Rawdon himself!" gasps out Miss Marsland, sinking back in her chair, and giving fiery glances across at the corner table, where her lover sits facing her; facing her, but I am bound to say looking, soldier though he be, as if he would fain sink bodily down through the floor; and with his eyes ignominiously fixed upon the heap of cherry tart and cream with which Min's friendly hand has loaded his plate.

"Rawdon!" repeats Mrs. Crosbie, getting ready

her double eye-glasses. "Now I call this a very timely rencontre. With his academy school friend, no doubt?"

"Rawdon is with Mrs. Theobald," says Emma, her voice trembling. "Mrs. Theobald and a Person—a Person who is no doubt Mrs. Theobald's sister, the actress. Oh, I'm sure of it, mamma, from the likeness. Oh, how dreadful!" And Emma's very breath fails her, so vehement is her righteous indignation.

"Yes, there is our young Rawdon," says Major Hervey, with charming amiability. "Saw him the moment we came in. Perhaps," he pointedly addresses Mrs. Crosbie, not Emma, "as Rawdon is in *another kind* of society, it is a case—um—in which recognition may be—er—as well left alone?"

Mrs. Crosbie turns her head, gracefully severe in its black velvet bands and marabout feathers, and for the space of some moments gazes stonily through her glasses on the culprits: on Mrs. Theobald, whose blue eyes return the gaze as steadily as on the day when she was first mistaken in Spa for a princess; on Rawdon, purple with confusion; on Min, duly informed by Jane of the serious family's advent, and upon whose expressive mouth the broadest merriment is visible.

"I must ask you to conduct us from this place, Alfred." And, as she speaks, Mrs. Crosbie turns slowly round again from the awful sight of Rawdon's iniquities. "You are, of course, not aware in what society Rawdon is? An inhabitant of our own neighbourhood, whom we do not visit, and a person whom

I believe—I can have no certain knowledge on such a point—whom I believe to be . . . theatrical! I must ask you to give Emma your arm, and conduct us to our carriage at once.”

Adonis now leans across the table, and in four words puts the situation before old Mrs. Hervey: “Rawdon supping with actresses.” Awkward position; but still—Adonis believes his mother will agree with him?—one in which good taste bids one—aw—see nothing, and act—er—just as if nothing had happened. And his fingers, which still enclose Emma’s wrist, give her a tenderly reassuring little pressure as he says this.

“Of course, of course we see nothing,” says the fine old Pharisee, pleasantly. “Miss Marsland, my dear, you have the gas immediately before your eyes. You had better come on this side. These things occur every day, and Rawdon has far too much good taste, I am sure, to recognise us. Yes, Mademoiselle Boulotte has given me quite an appetite. She is the best actress I have seen the last hundred years.”

Emma, however, is neither a Pharisee nor a woman of the world, but a girl, very warmly, very earnestly in love, and trembling in every fibre with anger and jealousy. “Thanks, Mrs. Hervey. I think I *shall* be glad to change my position.” And she rises, and with cool, insulting emphasis of manner, turns her back deliberately upon her lover and his friends, then draws her chair to old Mrs. Hervey’s side. “These things may happen every day,” adds Emma, in a voice of suppressed passion; and somehow, as she says this,

she knows that her eyes seek Major Hervey's for support. "They will not happen to me twice; I am very sure of that."

Mrs. Crosbie's maternal heart gives a throb of cold terror. Is the price of this escapade, this crowning folly of Rawdon's, to be Emma Marsland's thirty thousand pounds, and all the county position, all the sacred blessings of existence that thirty thousand pounds can bring with them?

"Don't you think the fault may be a little ours in coming here, my dear Emma? We must scold Alfred for that. As regards Rawdon, young men——"

"If they be men of honour, speak the truth, at least," cries Emma, with greater spirit, perhaps, than she had ever shown in her life before. "Rawdon could not come with us, remember, because he had to dine with a school-friend who was going to China—to China, indeed! However, it will be a question to settle between Rawdon and me; between Rawdon and me, alone," adds Emma, indignantly. "Don't let any one's supper be spoilt by talking about it now."

And so, the shoulders of the three ladies set resolutely against the faces of the foe, supper is eaten. Major Hervey seems to be in unwonted spirits, and never lets the conversation flag for an instant. Disregarding the poisonous nature of the dishes set before him, he even eats and drinks; shows his magnificent teeth to the gold, as he smiles at Emma and his own stories; and all the time manages to give an occasional glance of insolent admiration in the direction

of Jane and of her sister, that makes young Rawdon's blood boil.

What an anti-climax to the evening that began so happily at the Prince of Wales's—listening to a delightfully-acted love idyll, dreaming a still more delightful idyll of one's own! Were he to follow impulse merely, Rawdon Crosbie would march straight, with his companions, from the rooms; spare Jane the humiliation, covert though it be, with which his own ludicrous position is clothing her. But with Min's laughing eyes fixed upon him he dare not thus show the better part of valour. All he dare do is—sit still; return the glances of Adonis, with savage interest; force himself to laugh and jest, with the best grace he can; drink champagne, every glass of which seems to make his soul flatter and flatter; and watch the back of Emmy's scarlet streamers and of his mother's marabouts.

Jane, at length, brings his sufferings to an end. "If we have all finished . . . it seems a pity to hurry when we are so comfortable . . . but if we have all really finished, we may as well be off. I don't want Theobald to get home before I do." And Rawdon acquiescing only too promptly, she rises (by a furtive turn of the head Emma's jealous eyes can watch every movement of her rival's slight, graceful figure), coolly surveys herself, as she adjusts her opera cloak in a neighbouring mirror; then, with an air of calmest appropriation, puts her hand within Rawdon's arm, and

followed by Min, who bestows a saucy smile of adieu upon the family party as she goes by, leaves the room.

Rawdon pays the cost of the entertainment to the head waiter, who stands, bill in hand, at the door, and to whom the actress gives a friendly "Good-bye, Charles," at parting. And then they go out into the night.

Min is in the sort of wild spirits that succeed naturally to a pleasantly spent evening, and an excellent supper and heady champagne; and she "chaffs" Rawdon unmercifully. His mamma, his sweetheart, the gentleman with the eyelids, the lecture that awaits him, Rawdon, to-morrow—all are pantomimed by Miss Arundel, for his benefit, as they stand outside the door of Wilcocks's, waiting for an empty cab to pass along. But Jane is dead silent, and continues so during the whole of the drive back to Maddox Street.

"Thanks for a very jolly evening," says Min, when Rawdon, after dismissing the cab, is preparing to wish the ladies good-night at the door of Theobalds' lodgings. "I suppose we shall see each other again before we die?"

"A great many times, I should hope, if life is to be worth holding," answers Rawdon Crosbie.

"I'm going to the Chalkshire races, with Jane and Theobald, if I shouldn't see you before, and then—but no," cries the little actress, looking up into his face with an air of mock pity; "after to-night's experience we won't make plans. Cruel to talk of what

the future might bring forth to any one in your precarious situation."

And then, with all her satins and furbelows rustling, away Min runs up the stairs; and Rawdon, whose present fate appears to be to feel like a culprit before every one, is left alone with Jane. Maddox Street, at this hour, is almost silent. An occasional passer-by on foot, the distant drone of carriage-wheels in Regent Street, are all that break the quiet. They are as much alone as they were on Sunday evening, in the moss-grown garden at Theobalds.

"That was a queer kind of meeting for us all to-night, I must say," remarks Jane, amicably, yet with a certain tone in her voice that Rawdon has learnt to dread. "Why didn't you tell me your people were in town?"

"Oh, I—I thought I had mentioned it. Yes, my mother and Emma came up on Monday. They are spending a few days with our relations, the Herveys."

He does his best to speak lightly, as if nothing of any moment had occurred, and fails egregiously.

"The Herveys. Are those the people I saw them with at the supper-rooms?"

"Yes."

Jane hesitates for a minute before she speaks again. A street lamp immediately opposite shines full upon her face, and Rawdon can see a tell-tale quiver about the corners of her lips. She hesitates, but for a minute only; then, in her usual impetuous fashion, breaks forth thus: "I'm sorry this has happened, Rawdon,

because it's going to bring things to a smash between you and me; and yet, in another way, I'm glad. It has opened my eyes pretty sharply to something good for me to see. Now, my dear child, listen, and take the best bit of advice that has ever been given you in your life yet. Cut me. I'm a bad business, as far as you are concerned. Have nothing more to say to me."

He makes no answer, and probably Jane expects none. She must guess pretty accurately, one would think, what the poor young fellow feels just at this moment.

"Of course I knew how we stood towards each other before this, or I ought. I've had lessons enough on all useful subjects of late; but it never came home to me like it did to-night. For there was Min, you see! I've been so long out of the profession that I seem neither one thing nor the other—to myself, at least. Min is the real genuine article, an actress in heart, soul, body. Min shows me what *I* am to people like your mother and Miss Marsland. Rawdon, if we had been—if poor Min and I had been a pair of escaped convicts," cries Jane, with a half-fierce, half-sad sort of a little laugh, "we could scarce have been looked at with eyes of more pious horror. Why, even you——"

"Mrs. Theobald!——"

"No; hear me out. Even you knew too well what was due—that's the word, I think?—due to yourself and to the girl you mean to marry to leave our side

and speak to her. Well, you see, I don't mean to be placed like that again, 'not never no more,' as Blossy says. If those ladies were anything to you but what they are, I should say simply, "Choose between them and me, and I am the best worth choosing." I can't say that as it is, can I?"

Yes; she can say what she likes; she has only to speak to command him in all things, cries Rawdon's heart! But his lips do not give utterance to this avowal of disallegiance.

"And so, what I do say is—cut me. I'll give you another bit of wise and wholesome advice. Run away to-morrow morning, early, to Miss Marsland, and make the prettiest apology you can for being seen with such *doubtful associates*. You broke some lawful engagement, by-the-by, Master Rawdon, did you not, in order to go to 'School' with us?"

"I would have broken any engagement, lawful or the reverse, on the chance of going anywhere with you," answers Rawdon Crosbie.

"I thought so. Theobald says I have instinct, no reason. I suppose it must have been instinct made me guess how the land lay as I sat humbly looking at the tips of your mamma's marabouts. Well, apologize! Say you will never do it again—say we overpersuaded you; put as much blame on Min and me as you like! But make things straight, if you can, and get Miss Marsland to name the wedding-day as soon as possible. Good-night."

"And you think—you think that you are going to

be rid of me like this!" cries Rawdon, hotly; and as he speaks he leans his arm within the door, so as to hinder Jane, if she wished to do so, from shutting it. "Be a little franker, Mrs. Theobald! Say, straight out, you are tired of me; say that, from some cause or another, you want me out of the way for a time, and I'll stop away till you bid me come back——"

"And suppose I am not tired of you, and suppose I have no reason whatever for wishing you out of the way?" she interrupts. "Don't be a fool a second time, Rawdon. Take what I say, in plain good part as I mean it. Miss Marsland lives in a world that is not the world of women like Min and me, and you cannot, honestly, remain her sweetheart and my friend. You have to make your choice. Well, there can't even be a question as to where your choice must lie. I am nothing to you; Miss Marsland is, or will be, everything. Cry Peccavi, Rawdon, as you ought, and be quite sure—although, most likely, we shan't know each other to speak to in the time to come—that I shall be your friend at heart always. Now, really, good-night. I am standing in a draught."

But Rawdon's arm does not move.

"I have only one thing more to ask you. When is this cut eternal, of which you talk so cheerfully, to take place? I like to know accurately on what ground I stand."

"When? Why, when you are married to be sure. Do you think I would speak to any man whose wife——"

"No," interrupts Rawdon, quickly, "of course you would not; I know that, only too well. But suppose I never have a wife at all? Oh, such a contingency is quite on the cards, Mrs. Theobald! I promise to follow your advice before I go back to Woolwich tomorrow morning. If truth-telling can set things straight," almost with a groan he brings out this, "well and good. But suppose truth-telling results, as it will very probably do, in things becoming more crooked than before, will you cut me then?"

"It makes my head ache to think of so many 'ifs' and 'ands,'" says Jane, a little coldly. "Do what you know to be right, without thinking of anything but that it *is* right, and be kind enough to forget that there is such a person as Jane Theobald in the world."

"Forget!" But now Rawdon takes his arm away from the door. "Yes, that sort of cold-blooded advice is so remarkably easy to give! When may I see you next?" he persists. "When may I come down to Theobalds to tell you . . . that I have forgotten you? Sunday? No? Monday, then? I know I can get leave on Monday."

"Leave—from whom? Your commanding officer, or Miss Marsland? Rawdon, child, don't play fast and loose with your conscience any more. What earthly thing can you want at Theobalds now?"

"I shall want to tell you the result of your own good advice, in the first place."

"I shall guess that, when I hear the wedding bells ringing in Lidlinton church."

"And if no wedding bells are ever rung with which I am concerned? Oh, Mrs. Theobald, don't trifle with me—don't torture me! Tell me when I may come and see you next?"

For a brief space Jane remains silent; then, "You will not come to see me, and you will not write to me for one clear fortnight," she tells him firmly. "By that time you'll know, I suppose, whether you are in a position to have *doubtful associates* or not. And then, the odds are, my dear boy, you will cut me, or I you, which will come to the same thing. Now, good-bye." For a moment she lets Rawdon hold her hand, then moves away from him into the house. "Perhaps, if the Fates are kind," turning to give him a last smile over her shoulder, "the cut eternal won't come 'till after the Chalkshire races! I hope it won't—for Min's sake."

And with this exceedingly small crumb of consolation, young Rawdon Crosbie is forced to be satisfied.

CHAPTER IV.

Rawdon cries peccavi!

By eleven next morning, angry, repentant, resolute, all in a breath, he calls in Bolton Row.

"The ladies up yet?" Yes, it is Mr. Maurice's belief that the ladies *har* up; yes, it is Mr. Maurice's belief (solemn is Maurice's tone, and ominous, as of a man aware that family feuds are brewing) that the ladies will be able to see Mr. Rawdon Crosbie. But he will just inquire.

Mr. Rawdon Crosbie is kept waiting a couple of minutes or more, on the doorstep—a council-of-war, he feels sure, going on as to whether he shall be admitted at all—then is ushered, not upstairs to his mother's drawing-room as usual, but into old Mrs. Hervey's parlour on the ground-floor.

This looks significant: a kind of "scene in the front grooves," introduced to allow the machinists to prepare some imposing set picture in the background: and Rawdon collects his strength together for the ordeal which he knows to be forthcoming. The sitting-room communicates with another by folding-doors, which at the present moment are closed. Maria Hervey, alone, sits at a small table near the window, pretending to write.

She rises, gives Rawdon a clammy hand, and poin-

tedly cool reception; then takes a chair, at as safe and uncontagious a distance as the dimensions of the room will permit, and looks at the hearthrug. Evidently this ancient maiden has heard of last night's misadventure, and will contract as little contamination as possible from a person of Rawdon Crosbie's desperate and abandoned character. He is not in a temper to derive amusement, as he generally does, from Maria's hatred for him; and inquires, somewhat curtly, for his mother and Emma. "He must return to Woolwich by the midday train, and has not much time to lose, so——"

"Your poor mamma, I believe, purposes to see you shortly, Rawdon," interrupts Maria, without lifting her eyes from the hearthrug. "I am quite unable to inform you whether Miss Marsland will feel equal to the reception of visitors to-day."

"Equal? Why, what's the matter?" says Rawdon, determined to set things straight, even with Maria Hervey. "Emma seemed to be enjoying very excellent health and spirits when I saw her last, at about one o'clock this morning."

"Oh! Really! It is not my wish to hear anything of . . . of the occurrence to which you allude. Miss Marsland has been very far from well, for some hours past — out of one hysterical fit into another — her strength quite exhausted. Indeed, I believe it is Mrs. Hervey's intention, should no amendment take place, to send for the family apothecary."

"And I, of course, shall only be in the way," says

Rawdon. "So, unless there is a chance of my mother being able to see me for five minutes, I may as well be off at once."

Our good Maria, upon this, rises and leaves the room. Stealthy whispers are audible through the folding-doors; the rustle of a silk dress is presently heard, ascending the stairs. Then comes the sound of descending footsteps. An instant or two later, the door opens, and in walks—not Mrs. Crosbie, but Adonis Hervey. Adonis, who on ordinary occasions is never ready for the eye of man, much less of woman, before two, or three o'clock in the afternoon.

He enters: for once in his life lifts his eyelids sufficiently to give Rawdon Crosbie a steady stare.

"Good morning to you."

"Good morning."

Major Hervey extends a couple of chill, thin fingers, which his young relative barely touches in return; then there is silence. Rawdon, his back to the empty fireplace, keeps his head, at the altitude of five feet eleven, superbly aloft. Adonis, at the altitude of five feet four, stands languidly pulling his scanty, purple-black whiskers for a minute or two; then sinks down into the nearest armchair, suppresses a yawn, and begins to contemplate his nails.

"Deuced foolish little rencontre that, last night—eh Rawdon?" Something in the shape of one of his long, delicate nails seems to be amiss; for, as he speaks, Major Hervey surveys it closely and with an air of discontent.

Rawdon, who, as we have seen, is in no humour this morning for circumlocution, responds brusquely, "What rencontre?"

"Why, running across you and your friends in those infernal supper-rooms—Wilmots, Wilcocks—what the deuce is the name? Ladies would go—know what ladies are when they take a thing into their heads." I omit the multitudinous "ums" and "ahs" with which Major Hervey interlards conversation. "Mrs. Crosbie terribly cut up, poor thing; Miss Marsland hysterical. Tried to reason with them—my mother tried to reason with them—singular tact and experience in these little matters, my mother. No use." Major Hervey shakes his head with an air of bored but well-bred sympathy.

"I am really very much indebted to you, and to Mrs. Hervey also, if you have been trying to reason on my behalf," says Rawdon, coldly. "At the same time I must confess I cannot see how, or why, any argument was necessary. Perhaps you would be good enough to speak in plainer language? I am a very poor hand at expounding riddles. Has my mother—has Miss Marsland—sent me any message through you? and, if so, would you, as my time is short, be good enough to deliver it in three words?"

Major Hervey takes out a gold toothpick, and looks at it attentively; then (remembering, perhaps, of what some mortals' teeth are made) returns it to his waistcoat pocket. "I am considerably older than you, my dear Rawdon," he remarks at last, resting an elbow

on each arm of the chair, and joining the extreme tips of his fleshless white fingers.

Rawdon does not dispute the proposition.

“Considerably older, and—you will forgive me for saying so—considerably worldly-wiser. This foolish little rencontre—the society—deuced nice society, in its way—which Miss Marsland saw you in last night—um—ah. Deuced bad thing, I’m afraid, for your prospects as an engaged man, Rawdon!”

“I am much obliged for your solicitude, Major Hervey; at the same time, I must repeat, I think you are expending it needlessly.”

“You think so? Ah, you have much to learn, my dear friend—much to learn! Women—women,” says Major Hervey, complacently, “have been the study of my life. I have had extraordinary opportunities especially as regards phases of *jealousy*—of analysing their little weaknesses—”

Rawdon looks at his watch impatiently.

“And I seldom find myself wrong in any conclusions I arrive at with respect to them. This foolish contretemps of last night is one of the worst things—just one of *the* worst things—that could have happened for you at the present time. You understand me?”

“I hear you.”

“And, really, the whole affair is too puerile! For don’t—don’t for a moment think,” adds Adonis, with a little outbreak of boyish expansion, “that I put myself in the position of a mentor. On the contrary,

personally speaking, I only commend your taste. That blonde, with the figure and the blue eyes—my dear Rawdon, all I regretted was, that circumstances did not permit me to ask for an introduction.”

“You would have asked in vain, I’m afraid,” says Rawdon, with the air of a young emperor. “I am not in the habit of introducing men I meet in public places to the ladies of my acquaintance.”

“Ah! dog in the manger, on principle, eh? Wise rule, I dare say, for you. Who is your other friend, Rawdon—the little thing with black eyes and the fan? Your mother—poor dear soul!—has been telling me about the blonde (upon my word, in a certain demi-monde style, she’s as fine-looking a woman as I’ve seen out this season); but the other?—we only surmise as to the other.”

“The little thing with black eyes and the fan is a Miss Johnson, tolerably well-known in theatrical circles as Miss Minnie Arundel,” Rawdon answers, holding his nose still in air, but keeping his temper miraculously.

“So we imagined—and feared! Absurd—positively absurd!—the dread women all have of actresses—as if they hadn’t just as much, and more, to fear from the women of their own world! Well, and this Mrs. . . . Mrs. Theobald? From what your mother tells me, she appears to be the lawfully-wedded wife of a man I remember once in Paris. Tall man—yellow hair—eyeglass? Exactly. Didn’t know him personally; never saw him at the Embassy; not in my set

at all. Man with a story attached to him—turns the king a little too easily at *écarté*? No? Well, if not that, something of the kind.” This is the true Hervey mode of suggesting away character. “And now, it seems, married—*married* to a dancing-girl! Rawdon, my dear fellow, take the advice of a man old enough to be your—elder brother, and follow out your good mother’s wishes. I came down at her request, poor soul, to speak to you. Drop the acquaintance of this too-charming Mrs. Theobald until after your marriage, at least.”

“And then resume it, of course?” Rawdon asks.

“Oh, then do as you think fit,” says Adonis, with a satyr-like little chuckle. “A married man is in a very different position to an engaged one. How is your excellent father, Rawdon?” Major Hervey suppresses another yawn, and really looks ready to sink with fatigue. The discharge of all this heavy family duty has evidently been too much for his strength. “Fewer gouty symptoms than when I was last in Chalkshire?”

Boiling over with indignation, but still managing to keep his temper outwardly, Rawdon gives as succinct an account of Mr. Crosbie’s gouty symptoms as can be given short of positive rudeness; and his mentor closes his eyes and leans his head back in his chair. After two or three minutes thus spent, the door again opens noiselessly, and Maria, putting on a face and voice as though some one lay dead in the house, in-

forms Rawdon that, if he walks softly, he may go up and see his poor mamma in the drawing-room.

He goes up, and finds his poor mamma waiting in state to receive him, an open letter in her hand. Emma, with emerald-green ribbons in her hair, and with swollen red eyes, reposes on the sofa, a shawl over her feet, and a smelling-bottle applied to her nose. Why should a man be made to feel himself a brute by the mere fact of a young woman holding a smelling-bottle to her nose and having swollen eyes? As Rawdon came up the stairs his spirit was rebellious, his heart, under the influence of Major Hervey's good advice, hard as the nether millstone; and now, at the first sight of Emma, and of her poor little nicely-got-up apparatus of affliction, he softens into repentance.

"Why, Emmy, what is all this? Something new for you to have hysterics," he cries, coming up to her side, with hand outstretched.

By way of answer Miss Marsland raises her handkerchief to her face. "I've been very foo—foo—foolish!" she sobs; "it will never happen—no, no, mamma dear, it will never happen again. Ah!"

"My dearest girl," says Mrs. Crosbie, leaning soothingly over her future daughter-in-law, "be composed. Rawdon, have the goodness to stand aside. With her disposition to *faintness*, Rawdon, the result of painful nervous excitement, our dear Emma requires air. Be perfectly composed, my love, and allow me to speak. Now, remember your promise!"

Thus appealed to, Miss Marsland buries her head down on the sofa-cushion and applies her salts-bottle to her nostrils with such vigour that her poor swollen eyes wink again. Very few women look their fairest under the influence of strong mental excitement, and Emmy is no exception to the rule.

"Dear Emma has gone through a most distressing night," says Mrs. Crosbie, regarding her son with icy sternness; "but she does not judge you, Emma is too generous to judge you, unheard. For what occurred yesterday evening, the humiliating circumstances under which we met you, sir, I leave you to make your apologies to her, and to her alone; but I have a word or two which we both—Emma, my love, which we both think it is my duty to say first. I have had a letter from Mrs. Pippin, Rawdon."

"A letter from Mrs. Pippin!" repeats Rawdon, with unaffected innocence.

"And she tells me—but I almost refuse to believe it; yes, even on Mrs. Pippin's word, and in spite of what I saw last night, I almost refuse to believe such an accusation against my own son—that you—you have put this woman's name up for ballot at our Lidlington Croquet Club."

"Seconded by that shameful Mr. Smylie," cries out Emma from the depths of the sofa-cushion; "and just going to take his priest's orders! I'm sure the bishop ought to be written to."

"Is it true? Is this scandalous accusation true?" says Mrs. Crosbie, as the culprit stands, silent with the

silence of conscious guilt. "If you have done this thing, you will not, I should hope, be ashamed to acknowledge it."

"Ashamed! What of?" answers Rawdon. He speaks with an attempt at cheerfulness, but his voice is very far indeed from natural. His mother's ice-cold face, those quivering green ribbons, those plump white fingers passionately twitching round the salts-bottle, are by no means reassuring objects for him to look at. "If by 'this woman' you mean Mrs. Theobald, certainly I proposed her as a member of the Lidlington Croquet Club, and Smylie seconded the proposition. Let me see," he goes on, with the audacity of desperation, "that was on Saturday last. I think I said something to you about it at the time, Emmy? Mrs. Theobald will be balloted for to-morrow."

"Mrs. Theobald balloted for! Rawdon, if it were not that this person had been put up by you, by my son, I doubt if the form of a ballot would be gone through at all. You are not aware, perhaps, that there is a rule empowering the club, under certain most rare, most aggravated circumstances, to dispense with a ballot altogether. Well, there is such a rule then; number twenty-three. 'If any person notoriously——'"

"Mother, stop!" interrupts Rawdon, the blood rushing hotly across his face, "I will hear no one—no, mother, not even you—speak lightly of Mrs. Theobald."

"I do not speak lightly of her, Rawdon, I do not speak lightly of any one, upon my own responsibility.

I trust I know my Christian duty too well for that. If you had heard me out you would have been aware that the severest word employed in rule twenty-three is—‘ineligible.’ ‘If any person notoriously ineligible shall——’ ”

“Yes; but why is Mrs. Theobald ineligible? Before I acknowledge myself to be in the wrong in proposing her, let me know in common fairness on what grounds my offence is based. Why is Mrs. Theobald notoriously ineligible?”

“Simply because she is not visited in the county. Your own good sense, your own good taste might supply you with that answer.”

“The answer is no answer. You make up your minds, all of you, not to visit A., B., or C.; and then when you are asked what her crime is, you say, ‘Oh, she is not visited.’ Is this justice, is this honesty?”

“Rawdon,” says Mrs. Crosbie, chillingly, “I am in no humour for hair-splitting. You have acted, I am willing to hope and believe, under evil influence, and in a manner that you yourself, a few years hence, will be the first to condemn. Hear what our relative, hear what dear Alfred Hervey, a man of the world, a man accustomed to the highest rank of society, thinks about it.”

“I have heard, mother. No number of years, I hope, will ever bring me to the way of thinking of Alfred Hervey.”

“Acting under evil influences, I repeat, you have

foolishly betrayed your father and me and all of us into a most painful, I might say a most lowering position! You must very well know, Rawdon, your ignorance of common decency cannot be so great but that you must very well know the Lidlington Croquet Club can never admit the person you have proposed as a member?"

For a minute or two Rawdon makes no answer. "I don't seek to change your opinions, mother," he breaks forth at last. "Blackball Mrs. Theobald, taboo her, persecute her as you like—it is no business of mine. One thing only I think I may fairly ask you before the subject is done with for ever." For ever! The green ribbons flutter up suddenly; and Emma looks, very full and steadily, at her lover. "*What* is the charge brought against her? I have listened to a great many hints, I have seen a great many shakes of the head, from the day when we mistook her for the Princess Czartoriska in Spa till now. I have never heard one fair, above-board statement yet. *What* is Mrs. Theobald's crime? Why is she not to be visited? Why is she not to be a member of the Lidlington Croquet Club?"

"Do you wish a subject of this nature to be discussed in Emma's presence, sir?"

"Most certainly I do. Why not?"

"Well, then, in the first place, Mr. Francis Theobald's wife does not belong by birth to the same station of life as ourselves."

“Birth! And Mrs. Coventry Brown is the leader of the Lidlington society.”

“Her ideas, her habits, her associations must be . . . fast! I detest the word, Rawdon, but you oblige me, you oblige me to use it.”

Rawdon Crosbie on this looks straight into his mother’s face; then he bursts into a laugh. “Fast! Mrs. Theobald fast! Mother, let me ask you who at the present time is the most-sought-after woman throughout the length and breadth of Chalkshire? Who dines everywhere, from the Archdeacon’s upwards and downwards? Whose name have we vainly tried to get at the head of our croquet list? Who is the show-guest at our little entertainments? To whose table do we move heaven and earth to obtain an invitation? Visiting Lady Rose Golightly, associating with her, courting her, as we do, have we the right—I put it to you, mother, as a question of abstract justice—the right to condemn any woman upon the bare supposition of her being fast?”

Just for one instant Mrs. Crosbie does not find a fitting answer come readily to her lips. Emma, who is at all times beautifully superior to argument, hastens to her relief.

“We must take the world as we find it, mamma. Major Hervey said so this morning. Every one in the county knows Lady Rose Golightly, and no one in the county knows Mrs. Theobald. What has abstract justice got to do with people’s visiting lists? I suppose Rawdon thinks we ought to set ourselves above the

Archdeacon and every respectable person in the neighbourhood!"

"It would be a hard matter, my dear Emma, to know what Rawdon does think," says Mrs. Crosbie, with cold dignity. "But it is not at all a hard matter to know how this quixotic championship of unpopular persons must end. I am far from accusing Rawdon of anything as yet but boyish folly; but folly beyond a certain point becomes guilt—yes, Rawdon, guilt!" And Mrs. Crosbie's voice trembles; her eyes fill. "And now, to-day, while there is still time, and here in our dear Emma's presence, I ask you to draw back from an acquaintance—I fear I must say an intimacy—which can only end in discredit and unhappiness to us all!"

With true maternal instinct she has made the very most that can be made of the situation. In argument the advantage is wholly on Rawdon's side: recriminations, anger, are thrown away upon him: at this sudden softening of his mother's tone, at this first sign of tears, this first quiver of her lips, all his boyish heart gives way! He made himself Mrs. Theobald's champion in the beginning more from a freak of obstinacy than of set purpose. That he has gradually fallen away from the narrow path, from his plighted word to Emma, ever since, his conscience knows only too well. And horribly sharp is the prick conscience gives him at this moment.

"I came here half an hour ago, mother, prepared to ask Emma to forgive me, prepared to tell you how

annoyed I was about—about the way we met last night. If you had let me see you at once, instead of putting me through a homily from Major Hervey, matters might have been sooner mended perhaps.”

“I don’t see that at all!” cries Emma, suddenly sitting very upright, and putting down her smelling-bottle. “Oh, mamma, indeed you must let me speak now, please. It is very easy for Rawdon to talk, in that airy kind of way, about matters being mended sooner, and to sneer at Major Hervey for his advice. Major Hervey has been most kind, and I value his opinion most highly. Major Hervey would not have excused himself from escorting us to the theatre on a paltry pretext, and then have gone to a public supper-room—and any one, Freddy Pippin, or any one from Chalkshire, might have been there and seen you—with a Creature like that!”

The scorn, the emphasis with which Emma brings out this deadliest epithet of her vocabulary is startling.

“Alfred Hervey,” observes Mrs. Crosbie suavely, “is a Man of the World, my dear Emma. Alfred knows the value of etiquette, as Rawdon will have to learn it in time. My dear, dear old uncle, your god-papa, sir, Canon Hervey, used to say that good manners are the small-change of good morals. ‘In our transitory state we have not time, we have not wisdom,’ the venerable man used to say, ‘to decide, on the spur of the moment, whether any intended action be intrinsically *right*. We can always say to ourselves,

Is it usual, for persons moving in a certain refined sphere of life, to do so-and-so? And we shall rarely, if ever, find ourselves misled in the result.' ”

“Mrs. Theobald herself is bad enough, in all conscience,” cries Emma, appositely. “Mrs. Theobald has only to move her head or open her lips for you to see what she is. But the other person—with the dreadful painted eyes, and covered with cheap trash, and the rouge *evident*, and I heard her call you ‘Rawdon!’ Yes, though my back was turned I heard her call you ‘Rawdon!’ ”

Poor Emma’s voice chokes as she recalls this crowning enormity on the part of Rawdon’s companion—she lifts her handkerchief once more to her eyes; and Mrs. Crosbie steals discreetly from the room. And now comes the real tug of war, the crucial test of courage for young Rawdon.

“The ‘other person,’ Emma, of whom you speak in such strong language is Mrs. Theobald’s sister, Miss Minnie Arundel, a poor little, very hardworking, very unpretending actress. The world of an uneducated girl like this is not your world—”

“You may well say that, I think!”

“Her ideas of conventional propriety are not yours. Perhaps it would be correcter to say that she has no ideas of conventional propriety at all. I was introduced to Miss Arundel at rehearsal for the first time yesterday afternoon, and I think about two minutes after my introduction to her she called me by my Christian name!”

“And what business had you to be introduced to any Miss Arundels, pray? And how, as your engagements would not let you come to Bolton Row till six, had you time to go to all these horrid rehearsals, and theatres, and things?”

Rawdon hesitates. He has determined to set himself straight with his betrothed, so far as this setting straight may be accomplished by absolute truth-telling. But absolute truth-telling is no such easy task he finds now that it has to be put into practice.

“One can never exactly say how anything happens in this world, Emmy. I met Mrs. Theobald, and she was going to call for her sister at the Royal, and—”

“Spare yourself all this, Rawdon!” cries Emma, with rising passion. “You used to meet Mrs. Theobald, accidentally perhaps, day after day in Chalkshire. It is possible. I will allow that it is possible. You could not have met her accidentally in the streets of London. Of *her* want of principle and of right feeling in trying to entrap the attentions of an engaged man, I won’t speak. Thank heaven, I have nothing to do, even in idea, with such women! But you, Rawdon—yes, for the time has come when I mean to speak in plainest language—you must make your choice between your present associates and me!”

“Emma——”

“If I were your wife I would bear your neglect in silence, and as duty bade me.” And in saying this Emma really believes herself to be uttering the truth. “But I am not your wife. My duty, thank heaven, is

to myself only still; and I repeat, you will have to make your choice between your present associates and me!"

She stops, fairly out of breath; her brow liberally moistened with agitation; the green ribbons standing up on end; her swollen pink eyes fixed angrily upon her lover's face. Never, it must be confessed, has Emmy looked less lovely in Rawdon's sight than at this moment; never has the contrast seemed sharper than between her and Jane!

Jane. . . He thinks of her as she stood last night, her lip trembling, her fair face kindling, as she made use of nearly the same words as Emma is using now—the same words, but with what a difference of tone and spirit!

"You have to make your choice, and there can't be a question as to where your choice must lie. Do what you know to be right, and forget that there is such a person as Jane Theobald in the world!"

A desperate resolve comes upon him to take his betrothed at her word; free himself at any cost; say one bitter good-bye; for the last time hear Jane Theobald's voice, feel the clasp of Jane Theobald's hand; then emigrate—to California, Tasmania—to any place where engagements, marriage, and all other social difficulties may be escaped from! But just at this point Emma gives a convulsive sniff, and once more arms herself with the handkerchief and salts-bottle, and Rawdon's better angel touches his heart again.

In this engagement of his he does not stand, it

must be remembered, in the position of most engaged men. Emma Marsland—dear, good, little, plain, long-suffering Emma—was his sister until the last few mistaken weeks that she has become his sweetheart. Emma to Rawdon Crosbie really means home, father, mother; everything in the world the lad holds dear—save one thing. There is something monstrous in the idea of any lasting quarrel between him and the poor child whose love for him has been as the love of a spaniel for its master from the day when she first ran, panting, after his cricket-balls, and stuck fish-hooks into her patient, little, stupid, fat fingers in vain attempts at making flies!

“You take things altogether too seriously, Emmy. You must get out of this habit of making mountains from molehills! Just because of that ridiculous meeting we all had last night—it was very ridiculous, Emma, confess it—to talk about my ‘choosing’ between you and any one! On your word of honour, now, in cold blood, do you mean to tell me you would be glad to have your freedom back?”

All this time he has been standing, frigid and distant, a couple of yards or more away from her. He comes close now, and stoops until his lips are very near Miss Marsland’s cheek. Her breath comes thick and fast; her easily agitated-heart begins to palpitate. Never has the affectionate little heiress loved Rawdon better than at this moment of acutest jealousy! And still she is stubborn—will not retrograde one inch from the position which she feels (which Major Hervey has

taught her to feel) dignity and self-respect require her to hold.

“I don’t know what you mean by talking about ‘my freedom.’ Do you think I should have written all the way to Mr. Mason in Jamaica unless I had known my own mind? Have back my freedom, indeed! And the wedding-dresses bought, and bridesmaids settled on—yes, and even the lockets; and to think of what the Pippins will say—actually writing such a letter to mamma about her! and, of course, they talk to everybody in the same way, for I have always thought them most ill-natured, in spite of all that friendly manner; and now you begin to talk coolly about ‘freedom’! Oh! if the case was reversed; if you wanted *me* to give anybody up; if you were to say, ‘Don’t flirt with So-and-so, or So-and-so,’ do you think I should not feel it a duty and a pleasure to obey you?”

The illustration, considering the slender amount of attention Emmy ordinarily meets with, is not, perhaps, a forcible one; but Rawdon makes the most of it.

“If engaged people were to quarrel every time either was amused with anybody else, their existence would not be a very lively affair. Suppose I chose to be jealous of Adonis Hervey, for instance! Adonis has scarcely been away from your side since the day you came to London. You were much more engrossed by him last night, than I was by Miss Arundel. Come, Emma, confess that you were.”

“It is not a question at all of Miss Arundel, except that I am sorry for your taste in being seen with such a Creature!” cries Emma, keeping Rawdon well to the point, however discursive she may be herself. “It is a question of Mrs. Theobald. Do you mean to give Mrs. Theobald up, Rawdon, or do you not?”

“‘Give up’ a lady who has a husband, home, child, already, and who cares about as much for me as I do for . . . Mrs. Pippin! Do be reasonable, Emma. Do reflect a little on the absurdity of what you are saying.”

“I am perfectly reasonable, and I have reflected well over everything. Will you give up calling at the Theobalds’ house when you are in Chalkshire? If you meet her at any time, or in any place, and I am with you, will you pass by without recognising her? That is what I want to know.”

“Emma,” answers Rawdon—but he draws away from her, he takes his former frigid attitude as he speaks; “do you think you are acting generously, fairly; acting as one woman should towards another in making that request? I—I”—oh, how horribly hard it is to him to say this!—“know that my acquaintance, such as it is, with the Theobalds cannot continue on its present footing. You have decided, between you, God knows why! that Mrs. Theobald shall not be visited, and, if you wish it, I shall, of course, have no choice but to leave off calling at their house.”

“If I wish it! As though there could be a doubt on the subject.”

"It matters little whether there is or not, Emma," cries Rawdon, waxing hot. "After what occurred last night, the deliberately insulting manner that my mother and all of you thought fit to put on, there would be precious little chance of my being admitted at Theobalds if I did call. Mrs. Theobald herself has told me that much."

"Has she, indeed? Excessive impertinence I consider it, on her part, towards the whole family, then," says Emma, colouring scarlet.

"You think so, after the treatment she has received from the whole family during the past three weeks? However, this is beside the question. As far as I am concerned, I can promise, with the most perfect safety, never to bring Mrs. Theobald and you into any sort or kind of collision again."

"And you will never call at their house, and if you meet her when you are with me in Chalkshire, or anywhere else, you will not bow!"

Rawdon turns sharply round from Miss Marsland; and in doing so confronts the reflection of his own flushed, horribly-perplexed face in a mirror between the windows. Was ever man, he asks himself, in so humiliating a strait as this? What *is* a man to do, what *do* men do, when feminine jealousy presses them thus hard?

His knowledge of life is sufficiently wide to tell him that if all wives and sweethearts exact such reasonless promises as Emma seeks to exact now, a considerable number of men must be under the necessity of per-

juring themselves. Is perjury, in matters pertaining to love and ladies, to be counted dishonour? A deliberate falsehood to man has Rawdon Crosbie never uttered yet. A good many little white lies his mother and Emma have of late forced him into telling. Shall another one, rather bigger, rather less white, perhaps, than its predecessors be added to the number?

"You seem to require a long time to consider a most simple matter," says Emma, not perhaps in her sweetest tone. "What in the world can you be deliberating about? Is 'yes' such a very difficult word to speak?"

"To such a question as you have asked me I think it is a very difficult word to speak."

"Then I can tell you, Rawdon, that you stand quite alone in your opinion. Mrs. Hervey, and Alfred Hervey, and everybody consider that I am perfectly justified, under the circumstances, in requiring that your acquaintance with the Theobalds shall come, at once and for ever, to an end."

After this Rawdon Crosbie softens no more. He turns, he looks, I must say with no particularly lover-like expression, straight into Miss Marsland's face.

"Mrs. Hervey, Major Hervey and everybody! You have been holding a delightful family conclave then upon my conduct, and the fitting punishment to be awarded me?"

"I don't know what you mean by a family conclave. Major Hervey saw how dreadfully hurt I was last night, and came home with us, although he was

engaged to two different balls, and stayed till nearly two o'clock, talking. He was here directly after breakfast again to-day, and I'm sure has said everything that is nice and considerate to mamma and me."

"And he advised you what terms you should dictate to me, Emma? Let us have the truth out."

"Major Hervey has been excessively kind and considerate," says Emma, rather doggedly. "Whatever opinions he gave about your conduct were given with the greatest delicacy and forbearance."

"And he considers you justified in asking me to break off my acquaintance at once and for ever with the Theobalds?"

"Most decidedly he does."

"Very well, then, Emma. You have thought fit to consult Major Hervey on a matter that concerns you and me alone; Major Hervey, I have no doubt, has prepared you for the probable result. I will not, under any pressure whatsoever, break off my acquaintance with the Theobalds, either in Chalkshire or elsewhere. And wherever and whenever I may meet Mrs. Theobald, I shall hold myself only too much honoured if she will condescend to notice me."

"This—this is quite sufficient!" cries Emma, starting to her feet. "We need have no more discussion. From this moment forth everything is at an end between us."

"That is as you like," says Rawdon. "If you choose to give me up because I refuse to offer a gratuitous insult to a perfectly innocent woman——"

“Innocent!”

“Yes, innocent! By heavens!” getting hotter and hotter, “and not only so, but honestest, truer, better, in every way, than half the people you and my mother court as associates; if you feel yourself justified in breaking off our engagement for such a cause as this, do it. You will, at least, have the good opinion, the delicate sense of honour, the worldly knowledge of Major Hervey to support you!”

An hysterical sob, a whole crescendo passage of hysterical sobs from Miss Marsland, conclude the scene. Enters Mrs. Crosbie, with a conciliatory, well-timed speech. Enters Maria Hervey, with a vinaigrette. Adonis, languidly repressing the chronic yawn, appears on the staircase; and Rawdon, uncertain whether he is the most miserable or the happiest man alive, rushes, without uttering a word of explanation or farewell, past them all, and from the house.

CHAPTER V.

Blackballed.

A LIBERAL handful of active envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness does undoubtedly leaven every human community. And still it is but a handful. The majority, the careless, forward-pressing majority of the world, are indifferent towards every man and woman who does not actually jostle their elbows or tread on their toes in the crowd. Let Jews, Turks, Heretics, unvisited people of all grades and degrees, take what comfort they may from the thought.

During the past five days Rawdon Crosbie's audacity in proposing Mrs. Theobald as a member of the Lidlington Croquet Club, the laxity of the Reverend Samuel Smylie in becoming her seconder, have been canvassed with angry heat by some few persons, intimate friends, mostly, of the Crosbie family. Society at large has felt only a mild and lukewarm interest in the subject. "Rawdon Crosbie running after this young Mrs. Theobald!—not very much to be wondered at, under the circumstances, is it?"

"Ah, well, I don't know. Miss Marsland is a most amiable girl, and over head and ears in love with him."

"Yes, but her freckles! And poor Mrs. Crosbie's way of bringing him up has been so sadly ill-judged.

You really cannot, in these days, keep a young man for ever in leading-strings."

"Some one told a lady, who told the rector, who spoke of it to my sister, that Mrs. Theobald stands a good chance of being blackballed."

"Not very flattering to the Miss Theobalds. But pride, even spiritual pride, deserves a fall."

"And not very flattering to Mr. Smylie. By-the-by, have you heard that he is decidedly ritualistic?"

"And engaged to this London friend of Lady Rose Golightly's! She looks old enough to be his mother, and fast . . . why, my dear, if one may believe half they say——"

And so on. Some people have heard, vaguely, that Jane stands a chance of being blackballed. One or two may have made up their minds how they shall, individually, vote. A few old women, of both sexes, have daily cackled at un-official meetings called together in Mrs. Pippin's drawing-room. The world at large has not taken the trouble to think on the subject at all; perhaps, if closely questioned, would tell you that blackballing, of its very nature, is a mistake; and that of two evils, to admit a doubtful candidate to a croquet-club—"particularly as croquet is an out-of-door game"—may be the least.

Such is the inchoate or jelly-like state of public feeling when Mrs. Crosbie and Emma return to Chalkshire on Friday night. By noon next day—Mrs. Pippin, Mrs. Crosbie, and other notabilities having met in

the interval—public feeling has become organised; uncertainty nourished into determination.

Rawdon Crosbie committed a grievous act of folly, no doubt, about that, a grievous act of folly in nominating such a person at all; but Mrs. Crosbie distinctly states that he did it under *undue pressure*. And Rawdon Crosbie is but a boy! Now, the thing to decide is, what will be right (putting all small feeling aside) for the club to do? Christian charity... ah, it will be much more really charitable to exclude her, poor thing; she would never have a creature to speak to on the ground. And one must draw a line—that's the real fact, my dear Mrs. Grundy, one must draw a line somewhere. If you admit a candidate of the stamp of this Mrs. Francis Theobald, whom will you not admit?

On Thursday night the chances were about twenty-five to one in Jane's favour. By noon on Friday they are even. As the afternoon draws on, it is no longer a matter of uncertainty at all.

Only, for the Miss Theobald's sake, and considering the circumstances of the nomination, a clergyman's name mixed up in it too, let there be no blackballing! This is Mrs. Crosbie's advice. As the hour for the ballot approaches let every member of the club, by tacit understanding, have an engagement elsewhere and leave the field. Mrs. Pippin has kindly volunteered a five o'clock tea, with music. Charming! Let us all be engaged to Mrs. Pippin's five o'clock tea. The ballot will fall through, simply from want of balloting

members, and Mrs. Theobald can be apprised, in a perfectly polite and ladylike note—not that she has been blackballed, but that, from unforeseen circumstances, the field was empty at the usual hour for balloting, and her election did not take place. Depend upon it, after one such hint as this, she will never seek to put herself forward again.

And Mrs. Crosbie, being a really popular woman, as well as a clever tactician, it is decided that her advice shall be acted on.

Most of the Lidlington ladies, young and old, are sure, now they have seriously thought things over, that they would sooner banish Jane's pretty face from their own hunting-grounds than not. At the same time they would rather effect her banishment by a covert than by an open blow. Which of us would not sooner dispatch an enemy by Sydney Smith's plan—ring a nice clean-handled little bell, which shall cause him to drop down dead in Japan—than by such disgusting, open-handed means of destruction as a pistol or poison? No blackballing: only a five o'clock tea, with music, at Mrs. Pippin's; and a polite, ladylike note to acquaint the victim with her fate. It must be acknowledged that Mrs. Crosbie has lighted upon a most delicate and yet efficient way of helping the club and its members out of their difficulty.

But whoever, in Lidlington society, acts without Mrs. Coventry Brown acts without his host! Driving, majestic, through the town, in her gorgeous carriage, with its gorgeous liveries, a gorgeous parasol uplifted

over her big white face and rose-decked bonnet—driving, majestic, I say, as is her Saturday afternoon wont, through the town of Lidlinton, Mrs. Coventry Brown is stopped by some stragglers from the croquet-ground, on their way to Mrs. Pippin's high tea and music, and learns what is going on.

“An excellent idea of Mrs. Crosbie's; exclude a person, not generally visited, from the club, and yet spare the members the painful onus of blackballing!”

Mrs. Coventry Brown looks upon the idea as contemptible. Why, pray, should a club, more than an individual, shirk a positive dooty? Nothing in a case of this kind, like striking one good, decisive blow—taking the bull by the 'orns. As for Mrs. General Pippin putting herself forward to give an impromptu five o'clock tea, all Mrs. Coventry Brown has to say is that she considers it, personally, in the light of a direct and intentional impertinence. The Pippins have been invited to her house to dinners, luncheons, evening parties, times out of mind. Well, she expects no return. She knows what the Pippins' means are. An Indian General's widow, and only two female servants kept, and the Miss Pippins make, or more often *turn*, their own dresses. Still, when the Pippins do give an entertainment, however humble, not to go through the form—the form of inviting their best friends, is to display their own ignorance. Mrs. Coventry Brown would not have gone had she been asked. Nothing more painful to Mrs. Coventry Brown than to feel that you are depriving a family of *necessities* with every mouthful of

cake you eat. Oh, dear no! not for worlds would she have gone; but for the Pippins' sakes, for the Pippins' sakes, she wished they had shown the common decency and gratitude to have asked her. What she will do is—drive to the Club croquet-ground, and, with her own hand, put in a black-ball for Mrs. Theobald. Mrs. Crosbie, and every other member of the Lidlinton Croquet Club, may hold their shilly-shally opinions as to right and wrong. Mrs. Coventry Brown holds hers, and acts upon them: will keep out doubtful characters from every section of society over which she has control. Much has been given her—much is expected of her; much it is her bounden “dooty” to perform. She goes to the croquet-ground; with a sense of righteous pleasure tingling at her very finger-ends, puts in her black-ball, and actually walks twice up and down the hot pavement of Lidlinton High Street, for the sake of publishing what she has done, afterwards!

And so, when Jane and her husband return home late that evening Jane learns her fate. No cards, no invitations lie on her table, as might be the case were she a visited woman, a Lady Rose Golightly, after a six days' absence; only a business-like letter, written in Mrs. Crosbie's clearest hand; every “t” crossed, every “i” dotted, and containing a short, cuttingly polite statement as to the result of the ballot.

“She must have been a little goose ever to put herself in the power of all those old dragonesses! But

she is a goose. These pink-and-white sort of women always are. You should have had more discretion, Mr. Smylie, than to become her seconder."

Lady Rose Golightly speaks; Loo Childers and Mr. Smylie listen. It is nine o'clock in the evening; the hour, this July time, for coffee on The Folly terrace. Lady Rose and Loo, in their Charles II. dinner-dresses, look extremely picturesque in the becoming half light, reclining back in the easiest of all garden chairs, and each with a porcelain coffee-cup in her hand. A heightened tint (of rouge, or emotion which?) is on Lady Rose's sallow cheeks; she has her chair placed so that she can watch the side-entrance to the gardens; the entrance at which any one walking over from the direction of Theobalds to pay an evening visit at The Folly would be sure to ring.

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Smylie," adds Loo. "And then after putting yourself forward as her seconder, not to have the moral courage to vote for her! So like a par . . . I beg your pardon. You know, I never did care for anything ecclesiastical before you. Honestly, now, why did you not defy all the bigotry and virtue of Lidlington, and go and vote for poor Mrs. Theobald this afternoon?"

Mr. Smylie answers, looking a good deal ashamed of himself, that he thought it best to be guided by the opinions of his friends. Mrs. Pippin—a very motherly person, Mrs. Pippin—warned him that he had gone too far already. The rector advised him to spend the

afternoon by visiting some of his outlying parishioners across the common.

“And you listened to them? Well, well—‘He who fights and runs away.’ No doubt you showed the better part of valour, Mr. Smylie,” says Lady Rose. “I wonder, if the Lidlington croquet people had you and me in their power, Loo, whether Mr. Smylie would have courage enough to brave public opinion and save us from being blackballed?”

“There would be so much chance of Lady Rose Golightly’s being blackballed!” says the curate, rather subserviently. “The complaint of the Lidlington croquet-players is that they have never yet had the honour of putting Lady Rose’s name at the head of their list of members.”

“Next to the Venerable the Archdeacon’s lady, and two above Mrs. Coventry Brown. No, I don’t aspire to such big capitals. When I come into the country it is for quiet meditation, not social distinction. Social distinction!” repeats Lady Rose, in a tone that ’tis pity none of the Chalkshire magnates can hear. “Yes, to think of the absurd presumption of these people in blackballing any one! I should say Mr. Theobald’s wife is just as good in every respect, social or otherwise, as any of the rest.”

“She certainly is better-looking,” remarks the vacillating Smylie.

“Mr. Smylie! I am shocked and surprised at your levity,” cries Loo, with an air of admonition. “I was talking to a lady to-day (I mention no names, your

own conscience may tell you who it was—a very nice old lady, the mamma of many daughters), and she told us—did she not, Rose?—that the parishioners think seriously of sending a round-robin about you to the bishop. A horrid whisper is abroad that Miss Marsland's engagement to that poor little Artillery boy is broken off, apropos of Mrs. Theobald. The next thing we shall hear is that the Reverend Samuel Smylie is to be sequestered—I believe that is the right term?—for a like cause.”

“Yes, I think so much of Mrs. Theobald—of anything but—”

Mr. Smylie gets into such an agony of blushing that Loo, out of sheer compassion, comes to his relief.

“Of anything but paying visits at The Folly, I suppose? You certainly don't do much besides just at present. Well, I am not sure that that betters your condition. Scylla or Charybdis—The Folly or Theobalds—which should you say was the lesser danger for Mr. Smylie, Rose?”

A ring comes at the garden gate as Miss Childers speaks; a deeper colour—it cannot have been rouge, after all—rises to Lady Rose's cheek. Loo Childers puts down her coffee-cup on the small garden-table that stands between the two ladies, and discovers suddenly that she feels chilly, and must return to the drawing-room for her shawl.

The curate accompanies her. (They are lovers, lawfully plighted, let me hasten to explain. Mr. Smylie's conduct is above suspicion. “As soon as ever you

get a bishopric I promise faithfully to marry you." Loo has told him. "Indeed, when you become dean, if you are a very rich and flourishing sort of dean, I don't say that we may not begin to buy our furniture.") Another minute and Francis Theobald is at Lady Rose's side.

He has been absent six days, and she is glad—eagerly glad—to see him, and shows it. He takes the chair left vacant by Miss Childers. Fresh coffee, with its attendant *chasse*, is brought out upon the terrace; and then, at Lady Rose's bidding, Mr. Theobald lights his cigarette and begins gradually to feel happy.

When he left home, Jane, not yet recovered from Mrs. Crosbie's note, was in one of her fine, hot, outspoken bad tempers; Blossy fractious after the journey. The cook, only half-expecting them, had given them greasy mutton-chops for dinner; and nothing unhinges Francis Theobald's moral nature like greasy mutton-chops. The old house, unduly shut up during the past week, was smelling more like a mushroom-bed and less like a human habitation than ever. What a contrast with everything about Lady Rose's well-appointed, quiet, luxurious little household! Theobald feels fonder of Lady Rose herself than he has ever felt since the renewal of their acquaintance, out of pure gratitude for his own personal refreshment.

"And so you and Barty have become fast friends again, I hear," she remarks. The lawfully-engaged lovers show no disposition to re-appear; and Theobald and his hostess are thus forced into one of those dual

solitudes which, of a summer's night, and with a cigarette, and good coffee, and an easy-chair, are really not unpleasant. "You will be able to renew your acquaintance with Arthur soon. He is to be in Chalkshire for the races—at least I conclude so. Arthur never writes; but our friend Mrs. Crosbie tells me the race-stewards have 'taken the liberty of advertising his Grace's patronage.' By-the-by, Mr. Theobald, how glad I am that you are to be one of this party on board the 'Laïs!'"

"Am I to be one of the party on board the 'Laïs?'" asks Mr. Theobald.

"So Barty says. I heard from him to-day, and, as far as it is possible to decipher one of Barty's scrawls, I make out that you have promised to join us all at Cowes the first week in August."

"Lord Barty was kind enough to ask me when I saw him in London," answers Theobald; "but as to my promising—Lady Rose, I never promise anything. All my views of life are short. I hold that for a married man there is no such thing as a future. He may propose——"

"But his wife disposes," interrupts Lady Rose, with her little bitter laugh. "So I am told. My own experience of marriage is too limited to allow me to generalise. Without promising, then, as promising is against your principles, you have some weak and vacillating intention of joining our party on board the 'Laïs' at Cowes?"

Mr. Theobald holds his cigarette at arm's-length,

and looks at it attentively through his short-sighted handsome grey eyes. He knows pretty clearly what poor Jenny's notions are on the subject of married men entering society into which their wives do not enter. In his heart he more than half believes poor Jenny to have right on her side. Still, Francis Theobald, weak though he be in many things, is a man of tolerably strong will on points that involve his own personal gratification; and the vision of the 'Laïs,' and of the kind of people Lord Barty Beaudesert will be likely to collect together on board the 'Laïs,' is not, I must admit, an altogether unpleasing one to his mind.

"I can understand a wife not liking her husband to go to ladies' parties without her," cries Lady Rose, divining his thoughts—divining the cause of his hesitation. "If I—if I" (pathetically) "had married differently, I daresay I might have felt the same. My life has put me out of the way—alas!—of all common jealousy. But a thing I cannot understand is a wife quarrelling with bachelor-parties; and Barty's are purely bachelor-parties. Loo and I come across them sometimes by accident, as we mean to do now, but they are bachelor-parties still. What can a woman expect who will not let her husband associate with men?—that he shall sit at home and embroider slippers, or what?"

"I have never embroidered slippers yet," says Theobald, with undisturbed composure; "but I daresay

it would be nice employment for wet days. I must ask Jenny to buy me some needles and canvas."

That one word "Jenny," the tone in which it is spoken, makes Lady Rose Golightly quiver as with a sudden bodily pain. Can it—can it be possible that this man, with his refined tastes, his remembrance of better things, can be faithful at heart to the low-born girl whom he degraded himself by marrying? Faithful! Lady Rose has been nurtured, theoretically and practically, in a school that knows not the meaning of the word in connection with the love of man for woman. Francis Theobald has sufficient pride to speak with kindness of his wife, and to seem, at least, to defer to his wife's wishes. Well, the weakness is amiable! Lady Rose shifts her tactics.

"I half hoped Mrs. Theobald would have walked round with you to The Folly this evening; but I did not ask her to do so in my note." My note? Then the call is not unpremeditated. "I know Mrs. Theobald hates cards, and some of the people from the Fort are coming in to have a little *écarté* by-and-by. I mean, one of these days, to have a party expressly for Mrs. Theobald, with no gambling allowed. Talking of gambling, if you do go down to Cowes beware of Barty's loo and lansquenet! He tells me Harry Desmond and little Lord Verreker are to be there; and we all know what that means! The very atmosphere of the 'Laïs' is a demoralisation to people with gambling propensities."

The suggestion is well-timed, the bait cleverly

thrown out. Curious with what aptitude some of these shallow but tortuous women—and when you pierce through her veneer of artificial liveliness, artificial sentiment, artificial everything, Lady Rose is radically shallow—curious, I say, how the shallowest women can acutely gauge and play upon every weakness of the man who moves their fancy for the hour. Straight-forward, full-hearted Jane, with the intuitions of love itself to guide her, cannot make the same good use of her husband's foibles that Lady Rose can. Imagine Jane, even to keep him out of a rival's reach, allying herself to the seductions of loo and lansquenet!

“Then, as I have decided gambling propensities, the best thing for me will be to steer as clear of the ‘Laïs’ as I can,” says Theobald, “unless, indeed, you will solemnly promise to take care of me, Lady Rose.”

Lady Rose's hand, her one beauty untouched by time, happens to rest on the back of Mr. Theobald's chair. He turns towards her as he speaks, and his lips are only a few inches away from the soft little white fingers, and a certain diamond ring that gleams and sparkles in the uncertain light.

“And if I do promise,” she asks, almost in a whisper—“if I do undertake the tremendous responsibility of looking after your morals, you will go?”

“Well, the question is, would Lady Rose's presence, on board the ‘Laïs’ or anywhere else, make my safety certain?” says Mr. Theobald, in his half-tender, half-sarcastic voice—the voice which, after all, Reader,

has been the one true note of music in this woman of fashion's hideously unmusical life!

She hesitates; she gives a quick-drawn sigh. To sigh effectively is an accomplishment requiring much experience and much practice. Lady Rose Golightly has had both, and does it well. She falters. "Yes—no. Everything depends, does it not, upon what one means by safety?"

And then her tone softens abruptly; the diamond on the small white hand flashes closer before Francis Theobald's near-sighted eyes, and both are silent.

"We must take the world as we find it," said Emma, with wisdom learnt from an Adonis Hervey. "Every one in the county knows Lady Rose Golightly, and no one in the county knows Mrs. Theobald. What has abstract justice got to do with people's visiting lists?"

Not very much, it must be confessed.

CHAPTER VI.

Alone.

A FORTNIGHT passes on, and the blow struck by Mrs. Coventry Brown proves, as she predicted it would prove, a decisive one. "The bull has been taken by the 'orns" to some effect.

There had been a vague feeling in the neighbourhood, before, that Francis Theobald's wife must be blackballed, because she was not visited. There is a settled conviction now that she must not be visited because she has been blackballed!

"Blackballed, and by the Lidlington Croquet Club! How distressing for those worthy ladies the Miss Theobalds! How much the husband is to be pitied! And I am told there is a child too, a little girl! So very sad! But this is the Nemesis that overtakes men who fly in the face of Providence by making such dreadful marriages! They say he spends his time almost entirely with Lady Rose Golightly. Well, can you wonder at it? Lady Rose is a charming woman—refined, sympathetic, accomplished. And to a man in the cruel position of Francis Theobald what—what can home be like!"

Home, I must say, has been rendered pretty warm to Francis Theobald ever since the evening of his return from London, the evening when Lady Rose's

diamonds sparkled on The Folly terrace. There are wives, chiefly in fiction, who endure the vagaries of truant husbands, and nurse their own jealousy in silence—patient Grizeldas of the earth who, by continuous, sullen long-suffering, the “constant dropping” of injured eyes and tear-stained cheeks, do frequently bring their husbands to grief and desperation in the end. And there are wives who rebel passionately under neglect, speak their minds out, take rash reprisals, and not unfrequently come to desperation and grief themselves.

Jane is one of these. Concealment of any kind is a physical impossibility to her. If she suspects, she gives broadest utterance to her suspicion. If she means to retaliate, she warns you beforehand that she will do so. The tell-tale, blushing cheek, the lucid eyes, the rash, frank tongue, the transparent, passionate spirit—all about Jane is in accord, and all just as the great fashioner, Nature, made it! She knows no laws but those of impulse; never in her life did a prudent thing—your Grizeldas are miracles of prudence—and up to the present time never a dishonest one. Now, her future lies a good deal at Mr. Theobald’s disposition. This girl of nineteen, with all her strong capabilities for good and for evil, stands, as it were, at the junction of two cross-roads, and stands there hesitating, wanting but a touch to push her either way, so long as the hand that gives the touch be Theobald’s.

“Do as you like! go on with this intimacy till you have brought things to their bitter end; but remember,

whatever comes of it, Theobald, 'twill be your doing. I'm not a woman to watch and suspect, and be silent, to quarrel to-day, and make up to-morrow! I love or I hate. Go on as you are going on with Lady Rose, and leaving me and the child alone in this wretched place, and, by the Lord that made me, I'll leave *you*. Now, I give you fair warning."

It is in the breakfast-room of Theobalds that Jane makes this pleasant speech. Mr. Theobald, outstretched in his easy chair—a little like the husband's figure in Hogarth's Breakfast Scene—is drinking his penitential cup of tea after a late bachelor party at The Folly the night before. (The Duke of Malta is staying with his sister: there are legitimate bachelor parties at The Folly now); Jane, fresh and fair as the summer morning itself, is seated on a low stool nearly at his feet, a frock she is embroidering for Blossy between her hands. Nothing very tragic in the externals of the scene; but are not all real tragedies, the social tragedies that go on about us in our everyday life, enacted like comedies until just the last moment, when the curtain falls, and all is dark?

"You are certainly the most unreasonably jealous woman in the world, Jenny," says Theobald, as he stirs his tea, with an air of quiet innocence. "I wonder how many times since we have been married I have had precisely the same things said to me?"

"I never said yet, because I never thought yet, that it would be possible for me to leave you," answers Jane.

"And you don't think so now, my dear. I was talking of scoldings, lectures, declarations of hatred, et cetera. Leave!" Mr. Theobald looks really amused. "*You* leave *me*! Come and give me a kiss, Jane, and don't be a little fool. We shall have Blossy threatening to run away, on strike, if she doesn't get all she wants, next."

"Poor Blossy! how much better it would have been for me if I had never had a child!"

Such a speech from Jane, still more the tone in which it is made, startles Mr. Theobald a little from the calmness, real or assumed, with which, up to the present moment, he has been sipping his tea.

"Better for you if you had never married Blossy's father, you mean. Out with it, Jenny. Don't think of my feelings. You know that is what you are burning to say."

"If I was burning to say it, I should say it. No, I can never wish I hadn't married you. The years before we set up being *respectable*, the years before we came to this hateful place, are to the good, all of them!" Her voice changes; her blue eyes, flashing with temper a second ago, soften now, as only blue eyes can soften, into tears.

"And Blossy is the sole impediment, then, that you want removed out of the way?"

"What wicked, awful words for you to speak! Poor baby; she is the only thing I've got to live for—the only thing, I'm sure, that keeps me here!"

"You wish no one gone at all, then?" Mr. Theobald asks, not without a smile.

"I wish Lady Rose Golightly was dead. You hear me? Dead! Be as shocked as you like!"

"I am not in the least shocked, Jenny. If fate obeyed the amiable wishes of women in this respect, I don't believe there would be a hundred of you left on the face of the earth, under eighty, at all events."

"What would you do—I ask myself that often in this detestable life of ours—what would you do if there was no Lady Rose Golightly? And you, who used to say you were bored by ladies' society! I know now how much truth there was in that little parable."

Jane, by this time, has risen. She flings down her work, and begins to pace up and down the room, her hands clasped behind her. She gets angrier and angrier every moment.

"Shall I tell you how often you have been to The Folly during the past fortnight, Theobald?"

"Three or four times at most, Jenny; and each time, you know, Lady Rose would have been only too delighted to see you if you would have gone too."

"Me! Yes, I'm so likely, after that first dinner party, to try another taste of society, to put myself in the power of ladies any more. You have been there, in fourteen days, exactly seven times, *to my knowledge*. Seven times, since I came back from London, I have spent my evenings alone."

"I dined on Friday with Mauleverer, my dear Jane——"

“With no ‘adjournment,’ as you call it, to The Folly afterwards?”

Theobald is silent. I will do him the justice to say that he is really taken aback at the extent of his own misdeeds, as set before him by his wife. Whatever Francis Theobald does, he does with the eyes of his conscience shut, neither counting up the cost nor measuring the risk; and then, it must be remembered, married men at all times are apt to diverge with an unconscious simplicity, that no woman, certainly no wife, can understand, towards the paths wherein they should not walk! Either our social bylaws make the downward road smoother to men’s feet, or the stakes to be forfeited on their side the game are less tremendous, or the weakness, born of selfishness, lays them more open to the wiles of the enemy. . . . Certain it is, that no woman could drift, inch by inch, towards the goal whither Francis Theobald is innocently drifting now, and not know it.

To the utmost extent that his temperament allows him to love anything, he loves Jane and Jane’s child. For Lady Rose (I do not say for the mistress of Beaudesert’s Folly) he cares not a straw, and still it has got to his spending seven evenings out of fourteen, with morning and afternoon visits unreckoned, at Lady Rose’s side.

One of three things—passion, vanity, or solid self-interest—must be present before a woman will risk the shattering of their household gods. A French cook, admirable wines, loo, écarté, and the easiest lounging

chairs in the world, are sufficiently powerful agents to lead astray the facile Rip Van Winkle nature of Francis Theobald.

He is silent; and Jane pursues her advantage. "Yes, seven evenings out of fourteen. When Blossy is gone to bed, and the rats begin to get well about, do you know that this ancestral abode of yours (in spite of its smell of blue blood), is not cheerful, Theobald?"

"I never thought it was cheerful, my dear. If you remember, my first advice after Cousin James's death was to sell it, let it, get rid of it in any way we could, and live abroad as we had always done, only——"

"Only, I, like a fool, proposed that we should try to make a home in England, and turn respectable!" cries Jane, with bitterness. "I thought, living a quiet country life, you would be less likely to gamble away your last inheritance than you would be at the kind of places we lived in abroad. I thought the child would be brought up better. I thought——"

"You thought Mrs. Grundy was not such an utter brute as she is," says Theobald, kindly; and rising, he comes to his wife's side, and puts his arm round her waist. "If you had only listened to me, Jenny, you would have been wise in time. Do you remember my saying that after being happy as Pariahs, we should be fools to try to set up as Brahmins? Do you remember my telling you we should never get on among a society of which all the members were better off than ourselves, both as regards this world and the next?"

“Oh, I’m not talking of such rubbish as ‘society’ now! Every fine lady in Chalkshire might have black-balled me, refused to visit me—though as to the next world,” in fiery parenthesis this, “*you* may think as you like, but I would back my chance against most of theirs—yes, I say every fine lady in the county might have turned her back upon me, and I should have only laughed at them. What have ladies ever had to do with me, or with my life. But you—you——”

He whispers a tender, a perfectly sincere, assurance of his unchanged love; he would kiss her, but she snatches herself from his arms; she stands flushing, trembling; eager—oh, how eager, to return to their shelter, but with her jealous heart holding her aloof!

“I like reality, Theobald! Sham, made-up speeches have no effect upon me. I’ve heard too many of them on the stage. Swear to me never to set your foot within The Folly doors again, and I will believe that you care for me as you used!”

“Don’t inveigle me into rash vows, Jane,” says Theobald, with charming good humour. “You know how often I’ve been made to swear I would never touch a card again, and you know how all the oaths have ended!”

“And you are afraid your new passion will prove as much too strong for you as the old one did, I suppose?”

“Passion! Jane, what a silly girl you are. When will you learn that life is life, not a melodrama? *I*

feel a passion for any woman, for Lady Rose Golightly, most of all!"

"Then," says Jane, with admirable swiftness of reasoning, "why do you spend seven evenings out of fourteen at her house?"

"We do a great many things without any particular reason, and certainly without any particular gratification, Jenny."

"Ah, I'm glad to hear you say that;" Jane retreats a step or two farther off, and looks hard into her husband's unruffled face. "I'm glad to hear The Folly dinners give you so little gratification. You'll be the less angry with me for what I am going to do. Theobald," taking a couple of envelopes from her pocket, "I got a note this morning from Lady Golightly. You know its contents, probably? Well, and I've written my answer. Shall I read it to you?"

"It might make things clearer to my understanding, my love, if you were to let me hear the question first; but just as you like."

"Do you mean to tell me, on your word of honour, you don't know what her note is about?"

"Have I ever shown symptoms of possessing the gift of clairvoyance, Jenny?"

"Do you, or do you not?"

Mr. Theobald puts up his eyeglass to look at nothing in particular, and stands the picture of a bullied, innocent husband.

"Do I, or do I not? Jenny, if I were to be killed

for it at this moment, I couldn't answer that question. Do I, or do I not—what?"

"I will save you the trouble of thinking. It would be a pity for you to fatigue your brains about such a trifle! This is her note—though in spite of all you say, yes, and if you were to say fifty times as much, I will never believe, intimate as you are, that you have not read it already, perhaps dictated it—I believe you dictated it:—

"MY DEAR MRS. THEOBALD,

"Will you and Mr. Theobald dine with me on Monday at eight? We shall be quite a small party; and knowing your predilections, I mean the rule of the evening to be, "No cards."

"I am yours truly,

"ROSE GOLIGHTLY."

"It is a friendly enough note in its way," says Francis Theobald.

"And here is my answer:

"Mrs. Theobald does not accept Lady Rose Golightly's invitation to dinner."

For a moment Theobald stands like a man who has had a blow. His nonchalance, his look of innocence, both take flight; an ominous, deep flush spreads gradually over his face. "You have no intention of *sending* that note, I presume, Jane?"

"What should I have written it for, else? I shall walk over to Lidlington and post it with my own hands this afternoon."

"You will commit the unwise action of your life if you do. Refuse Lady Rose's invitation if you like—the only woman," adds Mr. Theobald, actually beginning to lose his temper, "the only woman in this—blanked neighbourhood who has shown you a civility; but refuse it with common politeness. Why, that note is the note of a madwoman!"

Never since she was married to him has Jane seen such energy on Theobald's face, heard such energy in his voice.

"Mad—you think me mad, do you? Then all I have got to say on the subject is, I very much prefer my own madness to the sanity of other people."

"Jenny, you are a foolish, hot-headed girl, but you will never do such a thing as this. I don't want you to accept Lady Rose's invitation. I would rather, on every account, you did not accept it. Stay away—I'll stay away too, if you choose; but put your refusal into decent terms. That is all I ask of you."

Now a woman, jealous though she might be, who possessed tact, discretion, the commonest worldly prudence, would certainly here yield the point to the extent urged by Mr. Theobald. But tact, discretion, prudence, are not among Jane's virtues. She sees how deeply Theobald, usually so indifferent to all things, is in earnest, and forms deductions in her own

quick, unreasoning fashion as to the earnestness of his regard for Lady Rose.

“You are wonderfully anxious to spare her feelings, it seems. How much have you thought of sparing mine during the past fortnight?”

“All this is simple childishness, Jane. We were not married yesterday that you should cry if you lose me out of your sight. Besides,” goes on Theobald, losing his coolness more and more, “you are really the last woman living who should be touchy in such small matters! When did I find fault with your intimacy with de Lansac—Brabazon—young Crosbie—with scores of other men you have had dangling in attendance upon you at different times?”

Jane colours over brow, cheek, and neck; then she turns white with passion. “Rawdon Crosbie—Brabazon! And you dare—you dare liken my intimacy with them, with any man, to yours with Lady Rose? Do you degrade me, even in your own mind, then, to the level of fine ladies? Oh, I have looked into Lady Rose’s eyes, I have heard her and her friend Miss Childers talk; I know what fine ladies are! Do you degrade me, even in your own mind, I say, to such a level as that?”

In truth he does not. The shot, discharged at random, has struck home. In this poor ballet-girl, whom he took, at sixteen years old, to be his wife—this ballet-girl, with

“Her unromantic style, her ungrammatical lips,”

Theobald has trust most absolute—trust such as men

do not always have, it may be, in far better born, more highly educated wives. Jane unfaithful!—Jane, with all her tempers, and jealousies, and ignorance, upon a level with Loo Childers and Lady Rose!

“As to de Lansac,” she goes on, “I blush—I blush for you that you should bring his name into such a discussion. Why, but for his generosity——”

“Yes, I know, I know,” cries Theobald, not looking by any means at his ease. “For heaven’s sake, Jane, don’t let us have any theatre scenes of ‘powerful domestic interest!’ You know quite well I meant nothing serious by what I said. The whole thing is preposterous. Lady Rose Golightly sends us an invitation to dinner; you decline it, and I suggest that you should make use of the common stereotyped phrases of civilised life in doing so.”

“Civilised life! I don’t belong to civilised life. My note expresses what I mean, neither more nor less.”

“I have no doubt it does. But you should remember that there is some one else to be considered. You should remember that it will expose me to ridicule as well as yourself.”

“Oh, I should have thought nothing could make you ridiculous in Lady Rose’s eyes.”

“Once and for all, Jane, do you mean to send that atrocious note or not?”

“I do. I will not stoop to be civil to any one on this earth whom I hate. I mean to post the note with my own hands this afternoon.”

"It is not a note—you force me into saying so—that a lady could ever, under any circumstances, write to another lady."

"But I am not a lady. You seem to forget that."

"By God, I wish I could forget it!" cries Theobald, exasperated past all control. "Unfortunately, your actions give me no chance of that."

They are the cruellest words he ever spoke to her in his life, and when he has spoken them he turns—a curious passing likeness to his sister Charlotte upon his handsome blonde face—to leave the room.

"Theobald!" she exclaims quickly, "are you going? I . . . I shall see you again in the afternoon?"

"I cannot say at all," he answers with cold deliberation. "Very likely you will not see me. I have engagements that may keep me away till late."

"You are not—you are not going to The Folly?"

"Most undoubtedly I am going to The Folly. Such an insane note as you have written shall not arrive quite without explanation on my part."

And so he leaves her.

The die is cast; the turning at the cross-roads taken. From this moment on, until she finish with Chalkshire and with "respectability" for ever, Jane must stand or fall alone.

Alone! Reader, do you know the fullest meaning of that word?

CHAPTER VII.

His Grace the Duke of Malta.

As soon as Theobald is clear of the house Jane bursts into a flood of tears; but they are tears of passion, thunder-showers of wrath, not the soft and wholesome rain of repentance, and spend themselves quickly.

By constitution she is the least lachrymose of women; cries, as Blossy would, when any passing storm of temper forces her into such exhibition of weakness, but knows nothing of tears as a science, never uses them as weapons against her husband or as a source of strength to herself. Fool that she is—the thought comes across her suddenly, now—fool that she is, to do aught to spoil her face, the best friend she has left her in the world! Will swollen eyes bring Theobald home a moment the quicker, or a red nose make him likelier to stay at home when he does come?

She goes upstairs to her room, bathes her face with cold water till it glows like any fresh-gathered rose; by-and-by, when Blossy's one o'clock dinner is over, spends an hour or so before her glass, dressing, and then, the child for her companion, starts away to the town of Liddington to post her letter.

The Saturday before the races is always considered

one of the gay days of the year by the good people of Liddington, and this afternoon the shops and pavement of the High Street are really—if one compare them to Liddington in its normal state—hilarious. As Jane walks along, slowly, and with her slender throat erect, as she has learnt to carry it of late, she meets Mrs. Coventry Brown's carriage, the Pippin family on foot, her sisters-in-law in their brougham; presently, at no very great distance, descries the approaching figures of Mrs. Crosbie and Emma, Major Hervey beside them in the road—for the ladies' voluminous silks and muslins do not give the poor little Adonis room to keep on the pavement. It is the first opportunity Jane has had of confronting Mrs. Crosbie since the blackballing business, and with the well-balanced step, the composed mechanical smile, early learnt in her profession, she advances steadily and bravely to the rencontre.

Jane advances steadily! But Mrs. Crosbie and Emma are not it would seem, quite so well nerved for the meeting. At all events they shirk it, by turning into the Liddington Circulating Library, just when they are about half a dozen steps away, Major Hervey remaining at the door, prepared to give "our young Rawdon's friend" a superciliously admiring stare as she passes along.

Adonis, who has been staying for some days with the Crosbie's, is in excellent spirits, excellent temper with himself, although naturally bored at being so long away from St. James's Street, and as he stands pulling

his jewelled white fingers through his long purple whiskers, really looks almost young enough for the part of ardent lover which, ever since the morning of Rawdon's dismissal in Bolton Row, he has been enacting.

Of his ultimate success with Emma Marsland, Major Hervey has now little doubt. Her engagement to Rawdon is broken off definitely; the letter formally announcing the news of the rupture has been despatched to her guardian in Jamaica; and she spends any number of hours a day in Major Hervey's society, and listens patiently to any number of Major Hervey's twaddling stories about his own conquests, and does not draw her hand away if he chance to hold it overlong in his; does not resent it even, if her hand is sometimes raised, among the shady walks and plantations around The Hawthorns, to Major Hervey's thin lips.

How should this middle-aged Adonis, enveloped in the thick fumes of his own self-worship, doubt of poor Emmy's growing affection for him—I mean of the growing certainty of his marrying poor Emmy's thirty thousand pounds? It is not a very great match for a man in his position, if one consider over it. After being courted by Marchionesses and Lady Carolinas all one's life, only to marry thirty thousand pounds, and a girl whose family is not mentioned among the 'Landed Gentry,' in the end! But Major Hervey has a sort of delicate suspicion that his honour, his *honour*, is engaged—or so he writes to his mother.

For whether they be conscious or unconscious jugglers to their own hearts, these Herveys always keep on the mask scrupulously before each other. Through his advice, in some measure, her foolish entanglement with young Rawdon was brought to an end; the poor little girl has learned to look to him for counsel and support, and it is too late, his conscience really tells him so, too late in the day to draw back now.

He remains, caressing his whiskers, at the door of the Lidlinton Library, but does not obtain his anticipated stare at "our young Rawdon's friend," Mrs. Theobald's parasol opportunely interposing itself, not many inches from Major Hervey's nose, just as she passes him. For the disappointment, however, he is more than compensated, a minute later, by a sight sweeter to the Hervey heart than the sight of the prettiest woman in Europe: his Grace, the Duke of Malta, on foot, alone, and evidently approaching with the intention of speaking to *him*!

As the face of his mistress to a lover, as gold to a Jew, as fame to a poet, as the sun to the earth, is a duke, and a duke who will condescend to toss him a nod or a word, to Alfred Hervey.

"How are you, Mr. . . . Hervey, to be sure—Hervey?" The labours of a lifetime have mined Alfred Hervey into three or four of the best London clubs, just as patience, long-suffering, indifference to rebuff, have brought him upon nodding terms with most of their members. "Thought I remembered seeing you somewhere. Can you tell me who that girl

is who has just passed—the girl in white and blue? There, she is crossing over the road to the post-office.”

Before Major Hervey can recover from his delight at being recognised sufficiently to answer, Mrs. Crosbie, attracted by the all-powerful magnetism of the ducal voice, has fluttered forward, with Emma, to the door.

His Grace's reception of them is admirable in its brief simplicity. The Duke of Malta is one of the leaders of a school whose manners towards the other sex are not formed upon the exploded model of a de Grammont or a Chesterfield. Such women as poor Mrs. Crosbie and Emma are intolerable bores to him; neither more nor less. His pleasures, associates, sympathies, all belong to a different world to theirs; a world where cautious mammas and marriageable daughters are not; a world, perhaps, where insolence of manner, coming from a youthful duke, with an ample fortune still to get through, is leniently regarded. Though, for that matter, the Duke of Malta seldom finds himself treated with extraordinary severity anywhere.

Once a year, at the race time generally, the Duke spends about a week with his sister Rose; and during this week what avalanches of cards, cards from the whole Chalkshire society, lay and clerical, worldly and other-worldly, pour in through The Folly doors!

“Mr. Crosbie has not yet had the honour of waiting on your Grace,” says Mrs. Crosbie, the Duke having bestowed upon herself and Emma a nod like a groom's.

"We were not aware, until last night, that your Grace had arrived in Chalkshire, but Mr. Crosbie will at once——"

"Thanks. Can you tell me who the girl is who has just passed—good-looking fair girl, in white and blue? There, she has just crossed over the road, by the post-office."

Emma colours to the roots of her hair. Mrs. Crosbie puts up her double eye-glasses, clears her throat—thinks, perhaps, of dear old Canon Hervey's infallible recipe for virtuous human conduct—then informs his Grace that the lady's name, to the best of her belief, is Mrs. Theobald, "a lady only recently come into the neighbourhood; and——"

"Oh, *that's* Mrs. Theobald, is it?" his Grace cuts her short. "Just introduce me to her as she goes by. Not know her? Always thought everybody in the country knew everybody. Mr. . . . Hervey?—yes, Hervey," he turns to Adonis again, "just introduce me, will you, to Mrs. Theobald?"

Mrs. Crosbie and Emma fall back into the obscurity of the shop, not enlivened by this new proof of the innate depravity of men's hearts. Major Hervey prepares himself with zest for his favourite employment of character-blasting.

"Mrs. Theobald is the wife of a Mr. Francis Theobald; your Grace may have met the man?" His Grace nods. "But is not visited in the neighbourhood. Belongs—ah—rather to the *demi-monde*, er——"

"So I thought," says the Duke, with his usual habit

of frank interruption. "She hasn't much of the heavy Chalkshire cut about her. Who was she, do you know? I don't remember seeing her face about in town."

"She was," says Major Hervey, lowering his voice and preparing to wire-draw his subject-matter—are not numbers of people passing and repassing, and must they not all behold him in this delightful, confidential proximity to the Duke of Malta? "She was, till her marriage—since, for aught I know——"

"Hallo, Brabazon! Stop!" cries his Grace, as little Captain Brabazon at this moment passes down the street. They have met already at The Folly; and Major Hervey remarks, with disgust, that the Duke does not address Brabazon with the prefix of "Mister," which he so scrupulously accords to himself. "Just the man I want. Can *you* introduce me to Mrs. Theobald?"

Captain Brabazon can and will, and launches forth-with into warm praises of Mrs. Theobald's grace and beauty.

"Mr. . . . Hervey, was just telling me some story or other about her as you came up," says his Grace. "I'm sure I don't know what it was all about."

"I was merely telling your Grace what Mrs. Theobald was," Major Hervey observes, in answer to this pleasantly turned little speech.

"Oh! and what was she, then? We shall have time for the story, I suppose, before she returns."

"She was," says Adonis, glancing out from the

corners of his cynical old eyes, "in the 'Leg Business,' your Grace."

His Grace looks stolidly incomprehensive. It is a well-known joke among a certain set of men in London that Adonis Hervey will take any impertinence that any man with a title may choose to offer him: and this on a sliding scale—the higher the title the grosser the impertinence. The Duke of Malta, who recollects this "Mr. . . . Hervey" perfectly, recollects the joke too; and being at all times given to humour of a quiet and practical nature himself, resolves to play upon Mr. Hervey's little peculiarity now.

"'Leg Business!' What on earth do you mean by that? I've heard a man called 'a leg,' Mr. Hervey, and I dare say you have; but I never knew the term applied to a woman before."

Major Hervey gives a sickly laugh, but he turns yellow: I will do him the justice to say that; he turns yellow.

Years ago—twenty, twenty-five years ago, it must have been—a dark story gained currency in the world about Alfred James Hervey; then, as now, nick-named Adonis. Was the story true, or false? I who write do not know. A gambling scene—a Grif of seventeen, beggared and driven to suicide; a court-martial (Adonis was in the army, then), some officer of the same regiment, *not* Alfred Hervey, cashiered. These were about as many facts as ever became positively known to the public at large. The circumstance occurred the other side the line, and regiments, like

families, have a knack of keeping their untoward secrets to themselves. But from that day forth Hervey's was a name with a cross against it. Women shrank from him; men of unblemished honour avoided, though they might not drop, his acquaintance. He did not leave the army; his enemies—stay, I think it was his friends—said he had shown finer feeling had he done so. Alfred Hervey possessed the courage that can brave deserved contempt, the moral elasticity that can rebound from open coldness or veiled insult like india-rubber. He did not leave the army. In a certain sense he lived down the story of his youth. And still the story has never died outright. Still his name is a name with a cross against it. "Alfred Hervey! Ah, yes, *the* Alfred Hervey, you know, who was in that bad card business years ago. Wrong man cashiered—Hervey, it was said, had interest—just the kind of underhand fellow who could wriggle his way through anything."

This, though he belongs to the best clubs in London, is the way men speak of him, even now. From this you may perceive the drift of the Duke of Malta's little pleasantry.

The poor wretch, I repeat, turns yellow. He bites the end of one of his long dyed whiskers, as though for a moment he were minded to choke himself upon that savory morsel. Then he gets back all his coolness, all his presence of mind, and is Adonis Hervey again—Adonis Hervey, in familiar conversation with his friend, the Duke of Malta, observed and envied by

all this provincial herd who are passing and repassing upon their vulgar business, or vulgarer pleasure, along the High Street of Lidlinton!

"Excellent, upon my soul, excellent! Don't know when I have heard a better thing! I was alluding to the ballet, Mrs. Theobald's former business; but—ha, ha, ha! your Grace gave it the wittiest turn in the world. And *apropos*, too, the shoe that does not fit the wife may fit the husband. Your Grace, it seems, has met this Mr. Francis Theobald?"

"Theobald is one of the best fellows in the world," cries Captain Brabazon. Every acquaintance honest little Brabazon possesses is sure to be one of the best fellows in the world. "You require to know him, certainly; but it's surprising what sterling good there is, under all that lazy, Dundreary, exterior of his."

"Very surprising, I should say," sneers Adonis. "Well, I am not acquainted with the man personally; but I was in Paris at the same time he was, once, and I know what used to be said of him there."

Mark, admire the boldness of this, Reader! Could any one but a Hervey come thus to the front again after what has just passed?

"Pleasant person in his way, it was said, but a little too lucky! Turns the king a little too often towards the small hours of the morning. However, this was only an *on dit*. I should be the last man to say anything to Mr. Francis Theobald's disadvantage, now that he has come into a new neighbourhood."

The Duke of Malta stares full into Major Hervey's

face. He has eyes like Lady Rose's; those opaque-looking, leaden-gray orbs, which, more than any other human eyes, seemed endowed with the faculty of hard staring, "I believe you thoroughly, Mr. Hervey. I'm quite sure, if this Francis Theobald was . . . what you say, you would——"

"I should?" asks Adonis, all smirks and courtesy as the Duke pauses.

"Why, hold your tongue and back him, to be sure. Now, Brabazon, is our time."

And away walks the Duke, Captain Brabazon at his side, towards the graceful white-and-blue figure now not many yards distant, leaving Adonis alone in his glory on the library door-step.

I must have given the reader a very poor and superficial idea of the Hervey nature, if I need add that Adonis is in still better temper and spirits with himself than he was five minutes ago. Did not the Duke jest with him in the most affable and familiar manner, a credible witness listening?

"Have you heard the last good thing the Duke of Malta said to Adonis Hervey?" people will ask. People! Why, he will, himself, repeat the impertinence with honourable pride to every soul he meets when he gets back to London. If the toe of a duke's boot were, by accident, to propel him over hastily, I believe the construction of Major Hervey's brain would allow him to twist the slight mischance into a compliment.

And whether we ourselves happen to admire his character or not, we must confess that such a man goes a very long way indeed towards being a philosopher.

CHAPTER VIII.

“Nothing is against my Principles!”

JANE is dressed precisely as she was on the day when the Crosbies made her acquaintance in Spa; the cheap little striped muslin, the black lace scarf, the blue gauze bonnet made by herself—all is the same.

But whatever she may happen to wear, magnificent silk, or plain brown Holland, or twenty-five franc muslin, there is always *something* in the walk, the gait, the nameless airy grace of Francis Theobald’s actress wife which, to discriminating eyes, marks her out as not belonging to that small and whaleboned section of the world which is called “society.” The Duke of Malta, no unpractised judge of feminine charms (though frigid as ice to the Chalkshire beauties generally), detects this something at a glance. The Duke of Malta also decides that the blooming girlish face is as fair a one as his eyes have rested on for many a long day; and even before the formality of an introduction is gone through, resolves to accord this Mrs. Theobald, whom “the neighbourhood” will not visit, the honour of his ducal and most serious attention.

She stops, seeing that Captain Brabazon means to speak to her, and her voice, and smile, and frank untrammelled manner, complete his Grace’s conquest.

“I haven’t seen you for ever so long. You seem

Ought we to visit her? II.

to have forgotten your way to Theobalds, Captain Brabazon?"

Little Brabazon explains that he has been spending the last few days in London, but has now returned for the great sporting event of the Chalkshire year. "You are going to the races, of course, Mrs. Theobald?" he adds; the Duke all this time standing, his leaden eyes very wide open, waiting to be introduced. "Then I hope you will do us the honour of coming to lunch in our tent? The Colonel is going to send you a formal note of invitation on Monday, but meantime you will promise me, won't you, to make no other engagement?"

"There is no other engagement I could make," cries Jane in her blunt way. "Who else in Chalkshire but your people would ask me? Yes, I shall be delighted. Only mind, my sister—you know who she is? Minnie Arundel, of 'The Royal'—will be with me. If you ask me you must ask Min too."

Captain Brabazon says everything the occasion requires respecting the pleasure Miss Minnie Arundel's presence will confer upon himself and his brother officers. Then, turning to the Duke, he introduces him to Jane:

"The Duke of Malta, Mrs. Theobald."

Jane blushes violently—that loveliest rose-pink blush of hers—then gives Lady Rose Golightly's brother about the very coolest nod his Grace has ever received from a woman during his life. Brabazon, not altogether unsuspecting of the bad blood existing between Theo-

bald's wife and Lady Rose, interprets both nod and blush aright, and displays more tact than could have been expected of him by speaking to Blossy, and thus causing a diversion. The Duke follows suit; and, stooping, requests Miss Theobald to accord him the favour of a kiss.

"Ugh!" cries Blossy, wrinkling her nose into a grimace expressive of profoundest disgust, and clasping five small fingers tight across her lips. Then, Brabazon pleading in his turn, the little witch turns to him, and bestows, not one, but half a dozen kisses upon his smooth pleasant-looking face; glancing disdainfully the while at the Duke, as though to make her preference for his rival more unmistakably clear to his understanding.

"Your little daughter has learnt the first great lesson of her sex already, Mrs. Theobald."

"I don't know what you mean."

The Duke repeats his remark, which, like most remarks, does not gain in brilliancy by repetition; then, finding that Mrs. Theobald keeps silent, enlarges upon it. A woman's first instinct is to make men miserable, if she is pretty. Little girl as pretty a little girl as he ever saw—eyes, complexion, hair, the very colour he admires—but a coquette, evidently an arch coquette, by nature.

"The child shows her likes and dislikes, as I do," says Jane. "She takes to people, or she doesn't take to them, from the first, and never changes her mind afterwards."

“And do you never change, either, Mrs. Theobald?”

The Duke throws the tenderest expression he is master of into his voice;—he is a common-looking “horsily”-dressed young man of five feet four or five, with an unwholesome, reddish complexion, the lacklustre, Beaudesert eyes, a thick, short-set neck, and figure of corpulent dimensions;—and as she listens, some of the severity in Jane’s face begins to relax.

“I? Why, I change a dozen times a day. I dislike people furiously in the morning, like them at noon, and begin to dislike them furiously again towards evening.”

“Good heavens, what time is it now?” The Duke takes out his watch eagerly. “Five o’clock! Mrs. Theobald, has your time for disliking people furiously begun yet?”

“H’m! That depends upon who the people are.”

She gives him a relenting look from her blue eyes, though her lips still keep stern and grave, and the Duke of Malta knows that the process of wasting in despair is not, just at present, going to be added to his experiences.

Do not condemn her too quickly for her weakness, Reader. Recollect that among all the complex desires which bring about human wrong-doing, none is commoner or more potent than the seldom enumerated one of desiring to seem worse than we are. How many men and women can one remember, women especially, who have studiously lost themselves by act-

ing down to the standard which the world, justly or unjustly, has apportioned to them! Jane is not a coquette, save in innocence, as every young, and pretty, and high-spirited woman, unshackled by artificial rules of conduct, must be. Her heart, filled to overflowing with its one passionate love, has no restless craving for men's admiration. And as to fastness—well, if Blossy be fast, Blossy's mother, compared to the school of Loo Childers and Lady Rose Golightly, may be reckoned fast, likewise. But she has had a distinct part assigned her to play from the moment when Mrs. Crosbie threw her upon young Rawdon's chivalrous pity on the promenade at Spa; and she is sufficiently actress, woman, human, to enjoy playing it with thoroughness.

If war was to be waged against her, on a grand and aggressive scale, by the ladies of Chalkshire, should she not enlist every husband, brother, and son, willing to enter the lists, for her own poor little guerilla system of defence?

Well, and when any one of us has once set out briskly along the downhill road, is not our bad angel, opportunity, always at hand to loosen the drag from the wheels of our conveyance for us? Rawdon Crosbie's boyish passion has already put but too strong a weapon into Jane's hand. And now, at her side, only too ready to be her devoted servant before men's eyes, if she will accept his devotion, stands the Duke of Malta! Not, as we have seen, a man personally seductive, but a man with the purest blood—I speak genealogically

—the purest blood of England in his veins, a man openly sought after, secretly sighed for by every gentle feminine breast, high and low, in Chalkshire. Can Jane resist him?

If she were an unmarried girl again, a friendless, penniless dancing-girl, as she was when Theobald fell in love with her, and this ugly little Duke of Malta were to offer her his hand, name, wealth, in honourable marriage, I believe, from my heart, Jane's first instinctive answer would be an "Ugh," like Blossy's. But she *cannot* resist the temptation of seeming worse than she is; of displaying her latest conquest, creditable or not creditable, full before the outraged, jealous sight of Chalkshire society. She looks at him, the same covert encouragement still in her eyes; and Captain Brabazon seeing, or saying that he sees, an acquaintance to whom he must speak, takes his leave, and vanishes down an adjoining street. The Duke of Malta and Jane are left alone.

"Time for us to be going home, Bloss. Good evening to you, Duke!" bestowing a little, stage-learnt salutation, half chilling, half friendly, upon his Grace.

How prettily that word "Duke" comes from her lips! How refreshing it sounds after all the fulsome "your Graces" of Major Hervey! How charming is her assumption of their equality of station!

"If you are going home on foot, Mrs. Theobald, let me be your escort. Come, come, don't say no—part of the way, at least?"

"That leaves you a fine loop-hole when you get

tired," says Jane, relenting altogether. "Well, you may come part of the way, then, as you have put the request in such a mild form."

And so they start; Jane, poor little fool, walking slower, and with head more erect than ever! She jests, she rattles on in her wildest strain; her clear, out-ringing laugh startles the whole High Street of Lidlington out of its decorum. Mrs. and Miss Pippin see them coming, and run into Smith's, the linen-draper, whence they may modestly peep forth through the dresses and calicoes in the windows at the latest Theobald scandal. The Miss Theobalds meet them, and draw down the blinds of their brougham, as though they were passing a funeral. By the time they get clear of the town every one has met them. Jane's triumph such as it is, is complete. And a burning sense of humiliation and self-contempt at her own heart is the result! She looks abruptly round, after some ultra complimentary speech of her distinguished companion's; she sees Lady Rose on every line of his vacuous, vicious face, and becomes all at once conscious that she abhors him! Having an attentive duke beside one with an audience, in the High Street of Lidlington, is such a very different thing to having an affectionate duke in the same position, and without an audience, amidst unfrequented green lanes!

"Don't you think you have come quite far enough?" she asks him, with delightful impertinence. "I do. You know we only stipulated for part of the way."

"Do you mean to tell me, can you have the cruelty

to tell me, that you would prefer being alone?" he replies, in his tenderest tone, and looking with warmer admiration than ever into her face.

"Well, I must say I'm fond of my own company sometimes," says Jane, returning the look with one of ice.

He thinks that she is "playing cold," leading him on by a little assumed indifference: and, making the acknowledged best countermove in such cases, begins to talk on different subjects. This is a specimen of his Grace's conversational powers:

"Not seen much of Chalkshire yet, I suppose?"

"Quite as much as I ever wish to see." Jane quickens her pace a little as she says this, and keeps Blossy's small figure well interposed between his Grace and herself.

"Ah—find it rather slow work, don't you? 'To bless the squire and his relations, and live contented with our stations?' Not quite the sort of life you are used to?"

"I find it excessively unpleasant. I don't know what you mean by 'slow.'"

Silence during ten or a dozen paces; then, "I am to have the pleasure of seeing you and Mr. Theobald at The Folly, on Monday?" remarks the Duke, returning to the charge again.

"You may see Mr. Theobald," Jane's lip quivers, but the Duke does not notice it. He can tell when a woman's lips are red and full; no more. The analyzation of finer traits of emotion is not at all in the Duke

of Malta's way. "You may see Mr. Theobald. You will not see me. I have just been to the post with my refusal now."

"Your refusal! Oh, come, that's all nonsense. You must change your mind now that you know—I mean, if I implore——"

"I am not going to dine with Lady Rose Golightly," interrupts Jane, flushing up, "either on Monday or any other day. We don't suit each other in the least, your sister and I."

The Duke looks considerably taken aback for a moment or two after this trenchant declaration; then he shakes his head philosophically: "Curious thing, Mrs. Theobald—at least, I don't know whether it is curious, when you think of it, but it's a fact, that all women *hate* each other."

"I am sure I don't," says Jane superbly. "There may be women whose actions I despise, but I would not take the trouble, I would not stoop to hate them!"

"Of course. You all say that, and you all do hate each other just the same. Now, my sister, Rose, to take an instance at hazard, Rose always seems to me as jolly, kind-hearted a little soul as lives. But women detest her most confoundedly, on my soul they do! I don't know that I ever saw any woman but Loo Childers who could get on with my sister Rose for more than a week."

"Lady Rose Golightly and Miss Childers suit each other's tastes to a 't,' I should say," remarks Jane, her small nose well in the air. "You must remember *I*

belong to quite a different class of life. What can a ballet-girl—perhaps you don't know I was a ballet-girl before I married—what can a ballet-girl have in common with ladies like your sister and her friends?"

The Duke's great leaden eyes give her a stare of interrogation. What the deuce is she driving at now? he wonders. Has Rose been snubbing her for her crimes of superior youth and beauty? Or is it possible, in these days, when jealousy is so nearly an extinct passion, that she can be angered by Rose's innocent and pastoral little flirtation with Theobald? Well, if this be the case, none the worse for him. For a pretty woman to be jealous of her own husband can never be to the disadvantage of the pretty woman's admirers.

"Poor Rose!" he goes on presently, hitting, with one of a fool's fine instincts, upon just the remark most likely to please his listener. "What a wreck she is, to be sure! A dozen years ago—when she was your age, Mrs. Theobald—you wouldn't believe what a pretty woman my sister Rose was."

"Really! And Miss Childers?" asks Jane, affecting an air of compassionate interest. "Was Miss Childers pretty, too, in her youth?"

The Duke cannot repress a chuckle. "Her youth! If Loo could only hear you! Well, no, I can't say Loo Childers ever had an ounce of beauty, to my ideas. But she had a good start, that's what it was. If a woman only gets well away from the post from the first it goes further for her, Mrs. Theobald, you

may take my word for it, than all the features or complexions in the world. It is known that so-and-so admires such a woman, and all the other fellows follow like a flock of sheep. I'm not that sort of man myself," says the Duke. "I know my own tastes, and consult no one else's. But most men only consult the fashion. Well, you see, by some fluke or another, Loo got the best start of all." The Duke gives it in detail. "And that made her reputation. 'Not admire Loo Childers?' the young fools used to say, 'Why, do you know *who* says she's the prettiest woman in London?' And to a certain extent the success of her first season has floated her ever since."

"I am ignorant, deplorably ignorant, of everything belonging to the aristocratic world," says Jane, with humility. "Indeed, in the face of such high authority, it seems presumptuous in me even to offer an opinion. But if Miss Childers was ever the prettiest woman in London, all I can say is, I am very sorry for the rest!"

"Poor old Loo! I suppose you know the name she goes by in town? Harry Desmond gave it her—deuced ungrateful of him, too, some people thought—but 'twas several years after she first came out, and when her pace *had* grown rather unlimited. I don't know whether it's quite fair to repeat it," goes on the Duke, "particularly here in Chalkshire, and now that Loo has sown her wild oats, and seems to be taking to the church. However, I'm sure you are safe. Well, Harry Desmond . . . by Jove!"—the interruption is

caused by the Duke's looking suddenly back over his shoulder—"by Jove, here are some of those——old Lidlington women again!" His Grace makes frequent use of exceptionally ungraceful words as he talks. "Why these——old Lidlington women are ubiquitous!"

Jane, hearing such forcible language, looks back over her shoulder too, and discovers Mrs. Pippin and her daughter Lydia (Lydia, the eldest, plainest, most musical Miss Pippin,) steadily advancing at some twenty or thirty yards distant. And all her repugnance to the Duke—it might be juster to say, all her repugnance to the Duke's attentions—vanishes like smoke at the sight.

I should be unwilling, most unwilling, on my own authority, to state that Mrs. and Miss Pippin have followed the Duke of Malta and Jane of malice prepense. Idle tongues aver that such little acts of social espionage are to Mrs. Pippin as the meat and drink of daily life. But, then, idle tongues speak sometimes of Mrs. Pippin as the Amateur Detective of Lidlington, and even go so far as to call her pleasant villa house—with the flowers on the landing, and the five o'clock teas, and the musical daughters—the Private and Confidential Inquiry Office. What, however, will idle tongues not say? There are outlying labourers' cottages in the direction of Theobalds, and Mrs. Pippin is known to be charitable, after a frugal and admonitory fashion, to the poor. Who shall say that she is not on her road with tracts, or good advice, or even a bottle of inexpensive home-made physic, to some

fellow-creature in need of succour now? Whatever their motive, and whether chance or intention inspired their steps, certain it is that Mrs. and Miss Pippin did follow the Duke and Jane straight out of the town of Lidlington, have followed them, bit by bit gaining ground, ever since, and are now almost—for their own sakes I should hope not quite—within earshot.

"Poor creature! Poor unfortunate, misguided creature!" says Mrs. Pippin, in her dry old voice, as Jane's merry laugh rings, with a little flute accompaniment of Blossy's, through the lanes. "I beg, Lydia, that you will lower your parasol as we pass them. Quite a mercy neither of the younger girls was with us!"

A minute or two more bring Jane and her companion to the big mossgrown gates that shut out the avenue of Theobalds from the world. Here the Duke, by no means to his satisfaction, is told he must say good-bye; and here Mrs. and Miss Pippin, in spite of lowered parasols, find themselves constrained to hear and witness the following painfully improper parting scene:

"Come, you small coquette," says the Duke to Blossy, stooping down until his face is upon the child's level; "will you condescend to give me one kiss before I go?"

And as he says this he takes a dilapidated rosebud from the button-hole of his "horsy" shooting-jacket, and offers it with mock-serious gallantry to her baby hand.

Alas! no truer daughter of Eve ever lived than

Blossy Theobald. She frowns, dimples, takes the dilapidated rosebud; she kisses the Duke of Malta on the lips.

"I thought better things of you, Bloss!" cries Jane. "I didn't think your kisses were to be bought."

"What is there in the world that can *not* be bought?" remarks the Duke of Malta.

And Jane, mindful of her audience, smiles approvingly at the sentiment.

This is bad; but worse is still to follow. "Then, I may come and call on you to-morrow?" the Duke asks, as he holds her slim hand at parting. "You are quite sure, Mrs. Theobald, that Sunday visitors are not against your principles?"

Jane pauses a moment for the Pippins to come nearer, then turns her face, with characteristic amiability, full in their direction.

"*Nothing* is against my principles!" She enunciates this statement with deliberation, and in a tone pointedly meant for the gallery. "*Nothing!* Sunday, or any other day, I shall be delighted to see you, Duke!"

Mrs. Pippin and Lydia wait to hear no more.

CHAPTER IX.

Hope or Dread?

YES, the turning at the cross-roads is taken; but, did Fate will it, poor Jane's steps would only too quickly re-travel the road, even yet. Her fierce tragedy mood of the morning has all effervesced into farce—as many a tragedy mood of hers has done already; and long before she has finished dressing for dinner she is longing for Theobald's return, with a heart humble and penitent as a little child's.

“You are young, you are fair,” says the pretty face—her best friend—that looks back at her from her looking-glass. “What has Lady Rose Golightly, what have all these women who condemn you and who envy you, to do, in reality, with your life? What are Lady Rose Golightly's charms by the side of yours? Win back your sweetheart”—to Jane's mind Theobald is her sweetheart still—“not by scenes of upbraiding and jealousy, but by yourself. Make yourself doubly fair for his return, smile at him, love him; and defy all the dukes' daughters in England to lure his heart out of your hands!”

She dresses herself in white, as Theobald likes best to see her, a knot of ribbon of his favourite colour in her hair. She puts on Blossy's best embroidered frock, and, immensely to Miss Theobald's satisfaction, a be-

witching new pair of pink Morocco boots; she brushes the child's yellow hair into softest little wavy curls around her baby neck.

What a pretty picture they make—I write this, but Jane's vanity indorses it—the mother of nineteen and her daughter! How she can imagine Theobald looking coolly through his eye-glass, first at one then at the other, then making some enthusiastic speech, such as, “That he thinks he has seen plainer people in his life, taking them both together.” And then how she will fling her arms round his neck and sue forgiveness for her passion of the morning—sue, and be forgiven!

If the terms of peace be that she must apologize for her note to Lady Rose, Jane, in this revulsion of better feeling, knows well that she will accept them. Apologize to Lady Rose, win back Theobald to herself, and, perhaps—who knows? the idea has been often in her mind of late—persuade him to go to London or abroad in the autumn, and let Chalkshire, Lady Rose Golightly, and everything belonging to the time which has witnessed their estrangement, be like a bad dream, a tale that is told, and which shall be repeated no more.

Half-past six comes, but no Theobald; seven, and no Theobald. Jane, with a faltering heart, and beginning now to recall his last words before he left, walks, restless from room to room, followed by Blossy, who is on as high a pinnacle of happiness as an embroidered frock, curls, and pink boots can place any

human heart. Ten minutes past seven comes, but no Theobald.

"And if you please, ma'am, cook says if the fish is kept any longer it won't be fit to dish, and is master to be waited for?"

Before Jane can answer comes the sound of wheels, rapidly approaching along the avenue. Blossy, gladly expectant of an audience, shrieks "Dada, mine boots!" and rushing to the front door, holds one Liliputian foot out straight, ready for admiration. Jane contents herself by peeping through the drawing-room window-curtains. Such a greeting as she has in store for Theobald cannot be given before the servants on the doorstep. Her eagerness—her foolish eagerness to see him, makes her shy as a girl awaiting the coming of her lover.

The wheels sound nearer; a dog-cart emerges through the trees, enters the gates—a dog-cart driven by a servant in the Duke of Malta's livery, and without Mr. Theobald. A minute later, and a note, directed by her husband, and to which an answer is requested, is put into Jane's hands. And this is what the note contains:

"DEAREST JENNY:

"Send me over some evening clothes in my port-manteau, my dressing-case, et cetera. I shall stay at The Folly till Monday morning.

"Your most affectionate

"N.B.—White ties."

"F. T."

"The groom is waiting for an answer if you please, ma'am," says Esther, the housemaid, watching her mistress, rather curiously.

Jane has turned, not pale, but ghastly greenish white. Never surely, during her nineteen years of life, has colour so unlovely marred the carnations of her face before! Nothing of moment has happened, in reality. No materials even for what Theobald terms "a scene of powerful domestic interest" are here. A husband, after leaving home in a huff, stops away for dinner, resolves to stop away a day or two on a visit, and writes back to his wife for a dress suit and white ties. Nothing of moment in reality, but to Jane, in her present high-strung mood, it seems that the gates of Paradise have been suddenly, brutally, shut in her face, and the gates of the place that is not Paradise set open, wide as gates can stand. Just that.

She folds the note up, restores it to its envelope; then, wonderfully calm and self-contained in manner, tells the servant that dinner may be served at once, as Mr. Theobald will not be home to-night, and goes away upstairs, not running two steps at a time, as is her wont, but slowly, heavily, as if she had suddenly aged by twenty years or so, to fulfil her lord and master's bidding.

She fulfils it with scrupulous exactitude; packs up an evening suit in his portmanteau—his dressing-case, white ties, all for which he stipulated. Then, as a complimentary wife-like attention, adds a morning suit,

morning ties, linen enough to last him a week, if it should be his sovereign pleasure to stay away so long. This done, she rings for the girl again, bids her take down Mr. Theobald's portmanteau and give it to the Duke of Malta's groom, then walks to her looking-glass, and while the sound of the wheels tell her that the dog-cart is driving away, stares with tearless eyes—eyes that feel as though they could never shed a tear again—at the colour of her face.

What, in God's name, ails her? She feels nothing of the violent anger that she has felt towards Theobald a dozen times during the past fortnight; she feels no pain of any kind; only numb; numb, cold and just a little sick. She has been too long without food; that's what it is. Dinner, and a couple of glasses of sherry, and her colour, of course, will come right again. And she will spend the evening in looking over her finery for the races. And to-morrow the Duke will call—lucky, on the whole, perhaps, this getting acquainted with him just now. And on Monday she will put on her mauve silk dress, and her Brussels bonnet, and make the Duke walk with her, and display his devotion again before the eyes of the Liddington world. Can one die because a husband has taste so vile that a rouged and faded face like Rose Golightly's pleases him better than one's own fresh charms? (Nothing about Lady Rose's French cook and excellent wines, and the loo and écarté after dinner. Curious, how even the youngest and fairest woman will always harp upon the personal influence of a rival, instead of view-

ing her fascinations from the matter-of-fact or masculine stand-point.)

One cannot die; but on the other hand one cannot eat. Jane comes downstairs, holding the banister rather tight as she comes, and finds the dinner theory a failure. She can drink the two glasses of sherry, and finds herself better when she has drank them, but food offers a resistance to being swallowed the like of which she has only once before experienced since she was born—the time when Theobald lay sick unto death at Frankfort, and when, during forty-eight agonised hours, the German doctors bade her, gravely, prepare for the worst.

However, appetite or no appetite, she will not break down outwardly, and goes with courage through the pretence of every course; Blossy all the time singing and dancing, with the crushing unconscious cruelty of her age, around the room. Blossy, indiscriminate between dukes and grooms, has had two triumphs this afternoon: the gift of his Grace's dilapidated rosebud, and the admiration of his Grace's groom, to whom, while Jane was packing the portmanteau, Bloss exhibited her pink boot on the doorstep. And now she is singing and dancing ballets to the inhabitants of her own world . . . to a couple of blue-bottles in the window, to the sparrows twittering on the branches outside, to the portraits of the Theobald family—who seem to be looking down with profounder contempt than usual upon both mother and child. Happy Blossy! Fated, I think, by temperament, the leaven of

her father's Rip Van Winkle nature that is in her, never to suffer any very poignant pain, mental or moral, while she lives!

Jane feels in a sort of dual trance: she is herself, Jane Theobald, quietly sitting at table, with Esther, the housemaid, changing her plate, and Blossy dancing, and the ancestors glowering at her from their dingy frames as usual. And all the time she is some one totally distinct from herself: a woman, with hatred, with despair gnawing at her heart, a woman who watches the real Jane Theobald with a kind of hard queer pity, knowing that the worst has not come for her—knowing, with a shudder for the fate she cannot avert, *what* that worst is likely to be!

As the sun goes down the sky grows overcast with leaden mists, and by-and-by a soft dull summer rain begins to fall. Fragrant garden-scents come up beneath its influence through the open windows; the birds, though their roosting-time is past, give little low rejoicing chirrups among the trees that overhang Theobalds. To Jane all is black. Neither birds' song nor scent of flowers reaches her heart. Dinner over, she goes upstairs with the child to her own room, takes out the materials that are to be confectioned into finery for the races, and begins to look over some fashion-books her sister sent her by this morning's post from London. In five minutes' time books and finery are tossed listlessly aside together in a heap upon the bed. The sight of new fashions generally kindles Jane's artistic impulses at once, sets her nimble

fingers ready for thread and needle. All her jaundiced eyes can see in them to-night are a set of idiots, with patches of pink, blue, or mauve, stuck on the top of impossible chignons over each simpering face—idiots with deformed waists, and one Chinese foot a-piece ridiculously pointed forth from beneath their flounced and fur-belowed robes. They make her sick, as the taste of food, as the sound of the slow-falling rain, have made her sick already. Blossy begins to sing the 'Ten little Nigger Boys,' a melody Miss Theobald has lately acquired, and which she goes through with conscientious vigour from the first line to the last. Jane shrinks from the merry shouting notes as though each were a blow, and rings for the nurse-girl to take the child to bed. Mamsey is tired, has a headache; Hannah will tuck Blossy in and hear her say her prayers to-night. After this she goes downstairs; walks restlessly up and down the gloomy drawing-room for a while; then wanders into the adjoining breakfast-room, takes up her place beside the window, and stands there, long, blankly gazing out into the darkening silent garden.

She is in the real, not the speech-making or "high falutin'" tragedy now; the dull, apathetic, tearless mood, when any excitement, any stimulus from without, and unconnected with our own immediate surroundings, comes as a deliverance (a mood which I have always thought must be the danger-point, or crime-engendering mood, beyond all others, of our poor frail natures). An artist, at such a pass, may

find safe relief in expression. If Jane were on the stage still, with what inimitable grace might not her jealous heart goad her into pirouetting to-night! In the dumb, pent-in life of ordinary men and women there are no such legitimate safety-valves. She feels she must do something—speak to somebody; must act, move, get away from herself. The thought of sleep, or rather of watching, in this big lonely house, and listening to the rats at midnight—she has had plenty of experience of such watching during the last fortnight—is intolerable to her; yet she must bear it all. And to-night it will be watching for the morning only; not, as it has been before, for Theobald. No scene, either of anger or forgiveness, to look forward to: only the dawn of another day of separation—of another day that he will spend at Lady Rose Golightly's side.

Yet she must bear it all!

“Must? And why must?” cries out her heart, suddenly recovering from its lethargy. “Why, with youth and beauty still to the fore, mope through such an existence as this cold and unloved and neglected one that she sees opening before her? Why not return to the stage, and, at least till she is thirty years old, *live*? No fear of coldness or neglect there. The public is not Liddington society; the public is not Francis Theobald. Ah, and would not any admiration, any notoriety, be better than such a life as Chalkshire is likely to offer her? Why, even the Duke of Malta . . .”

A ring comes at the front-door bell just at this

culminating-point in her meditations, and Jane's heart beats violently—beats with a sensation which I scarce know whether to class as one of hope or of dread. "Sunday or any other day I shall be delighted to see you," she had told the Duke at parting. Is he taking her at her word already? A man's quick step sounds in the hall, approaches along the passage; the door leading from the drawing-room opens, and in the shadowy half-light she recognises, not the vacuous red face and corpulent dimensions of the Duke of Malta, but Rawdon Crosbie.

CHAPTER X.

The Secret of Jane's Life.

THE servant follows with a lamp, and Rawdon sees Jane's face advancing out of the gloom, unsmiling, but with a look of kindly surprise better than any set smile of welcome, to meet him.

"Bring in tea at once, Esther," she cries. "Mr. Crosbie, you find me all in darkness. I'm alone; Theobald is dining out to-night, and I forgot how late it was. I hope, in common charity, you will stay and drink tea with me?"

She shakes his hand warmly, but her own hand is deathly chill; there is an evident flurry and want of ease in her manner, and Rawdon Crosbie looks at her narrowly.

"Has anything very dreadful happened?" he asks, as soon as the servant has left them alone; "has anything very dreadful happened, that you have gone back to calling me 'Mr. Crosbie?'"

"Oh, thousands of things have happened," Jane answers lightly. "I've got news of all sorts to tell you. If you hadn't come, I meant to have written you one of my lovely epistles. The fortnight expired yesterday, you know, and I was just beginning to think you had forgotten about the races. Min is coming down on Wednesday for the day, and Captain Bra-

bazon has invited us to lunch with them on the course. And Rawdon, my dear boy—don't lose your breath—but his Grace the Duke of Malta is in Chalkshire, and he and I are tremendous friends already."

"The express leaves Lidlington at nine forty-five," remarks Rawdon, "and it is about nine now. If I hurry I shall be in time for it. Good-night, Mrs. Theobald."

"Good-night, before you have said 'How do you do?' Why, you don't mean to say you are going to Woolwich to-night?"

"I am going back by the mail at eleven," says Rawdon; "at least, I intended to do so. I ran down, hoping to pay you a visit of an hour or so, Mrs. Theobald; but, under existing circumstances, I see I may as well be off at once. With the Duke of Malta for your friend, what room can there be left for me in——"

"My affections?" interrupts Jane, with a laugh. "Oh, you don't know how elastic my affections have become—how warm and genial my heart is growing to every one! . . . And so you really took the trouble to come all this way to see me? Is this a good sign, or a bad one, Rawdon? What have you been doing with yourself? How has the world been using you since that evening when I preached you the memorable sermon by gaslight in Maddox Street?"

She talks cheerfully, but with too many words, with too palpable an effort at naturalness to be thoroughly natural—Rawdon Crosbie discerns. And how pale she

has grown!—pale, and with what dark rings round her eyes! She looks older by any number of years than on the night when they danced the “Grande Duchesse” waltzes, and walked back to the Bellevue together, her hand upon his arm, the June moonlight kissing her soft young happy face.

“I hope you think me looking my best, Mr. Crosbie? I’m just in the humour for compliments this evening, so please tell me something flattering.”

“I think you looking desperately ill,” answers Rawdon, with concern he neither dissembles, nor seeks to dissemble, in his voice. “This bleak Chalkshire air can surely not agree with you?”

“No; that’s just what it is,” says Jane, with a short laugh. “The bleak air of Chalkshire does not agree with me. I was thinking how I could best have a change from it at the very time when you came in.”

“And Blossy, does she want change too? And” (suddenly recollecting the existence of the master of the house), “and Mr. Theobald?”

“Blossy is perfectly well, thanks,” answers Jane; the servant at this minute brings in the tea-things, and she speaks with calmness and deliberation; “and Mr. Theobald too. I told you, did I not, that he is dining at The Folly to-night? Chalkshire is Mr. Theobald’s native air, you see; it is not mine. That makes all the difference. Have you been to any of the theatres since I saw you, Rawdon? Have you seen Min in her new part? All the papers speak highly of her except one, and we know well enough who the

miserable wretch was who wrote that. Even poor good old Min is not without her enemies."

Then, without waiting for one of her questions to be answered, she crosses the room abruptly, and seating herself at the table, begins to pour out the tea.

Never in her life, perhaps, has Jane looked fairer than she does at this moment, despite her pallid cheeks and hollow eyes. If her beauty hitherto has had one definite fault, it has been in its overflow of health and freshness. A harsh critic might at any time have called it milkmaid beauty, without great exaggeration. Paler, thinner, graver, Jane has advanced from *beauté de diable* to loveliness—or so Rawdon Crosbie thinks.

He watches her, with the lamplight bringing out the soft contours of her white dress and whiter throat and arms, and knows how much the madness which has overtaken and made shipwreck of his life has, after a fortnight's separation, abated; watches her, and thinks that to hold the place in her regard de Lansac holds—to be de Lansac himself, Frenchman, adventurer, no matter what the man may be—he would gladly lay down all that, six weeks ago, made life of value in his eyes.

"I was fool enough to quarrel with my dinner to-day," cries Jane, in her usual unromantic style, "and I am going to make up for it now. I hope you are bread-and-butter hungry. It seems our fate to eat odd kinds of meals together," she goes on, as Rawdon takes his place beside her at the tea-table. "Do you

remember our supper that first night at Spa, and how shocked you were at having to eat with your fingers? Ah! I have risen in the world since then. I can offer you a white-and-gold plate and a real silver tea-spoon now."

"And white-and-gold plates and real silver tea-spoons are such essential conditions of enjoyment," says Rawdon Crosbie.

"We spent a very jolly evening, I must say, though you were in such a queer temper. Do you remember how angry you were when I told you not to tread on your own toes, and to take de Lansac's dancing for your model? Do you remember the girl in white-and-scarlet you so nearly fell in love with?"

"So very nearly," answers Rawdon. "What a blessed thing it might have been for me if I had asked her to dance, as I intended!"

"Perhaps. I can never go into the might-have-beens of life. The facts as they are are enough for me—rather too much, just at present. If I hadn't left the stage, I might have been a second Taglioni by this time."

"Heaven forbid!" says Rawdon, hastily. "I mean, how much better it is that you should be—what you are!"

"You think so? Taglioni made heaps of money; and money, my dear child, money is everything. As the Duke of Malta says, what is there in the world that money can't buy?"

“And has it got to your thinking with the Duke of Malta’s thoughts already, Mrs. Theobald?”

“Of course. Where is the good of having noble acquaintance if you don’t try to raise yourself to their standard?”

“I must remember that sentiment of yours. The next time I talk to anyone with a title—Lady Rose Golightly, for instance—I must try to put it into practice.”

No want of colour is in Jane’s cheeks now. At Lady Rose’s name the blood rushes with painful vividness over her face and throat. “Lady Rose is—a very fitting sister for the Duke of Malta!” she remarks quietly, but with a curious quiver of the lip. “What were we talking about? Oh, the white-and-scarlet girl you so nearly fell in love with at Spa. Let us keep as long as we can to pleasant subjects—to any subject that is not Chalkshire! First though,” she puts out her hand and lays it kindly on young Rawdon’s wrist, “I want you to tell me a little about yourself. How are your affairs getting on, Rawdon? Badly, I’m afraid, as you have not cut me.”

“On the contrary,” answers Rawdon promptly, “my affairs are getting on a thousand times better than I could have hoped, inasmuch as you have not cut me! As I walked up in the rain from the station I was in fear and trembling, Mrs. Theobald. I hardly dared to ask whether you were at home, it seemed so unlikely that you would be good enough to receive me——”

"After being blackballed by the Lidlington Croquet Club, do you mean? If you knew how lightly that weighed on me!—and it was all Blossy's fault. Don't you remember the dirt pies? I felt it just a little, perhaps, when your mamma's note first came. Oh, it was a very civil note, Rawdon. You needn't fire up about nothing. I don't think I should mind it much if I was set in a pillory and pelted now. But this is no answer to my question. How are your prospects looking? How is your engagement—how is everything at home getting on?"

"My prospects," says Rawdon, "are that, barring accidents, and if the usual death-rate of our regiment prevails, I may become a captain by the time I am five-and-forty. My engagement is broken off, and no one at home has written to me during the last ten days."

"Cheerful! And our friend with the eyelids, Major Hervey, what of him?"

"Our friend, Major Hervey, is staying, I believe, at my father's. I ought not to include him in the 'no one.' Major Hervey writes me charming little notes of sympathy and admonition, which I find very useful indeed—as pipe-lights."

Jane looks at him searchingly. "Rawdon, my friend," she cries in her incisive way, "do you know that you are jealous of Major Hervey? Don't deny it; don't be ashamed of it. You are jealous, and you have a right to be jealous. This stupid lover's quarrel between you and Miss Marsland would have been made

up long ago, only for him. I saw them together for a minute, to-day, in Liddington; and in that minute I jumped to my own conclusions. Major Hervey intends that Miss Marsland shall be his wife."

"I have not the slightest concern with Major Hervey's intentions," says Rawdon, in a tone that he by no means succeeds in rendering indifferent. "Miss Marsland is as free as air to choose or accept whom she will. She has rejected me, and for me that is sufficient."

"Miss Marsland rejected you? Yes; but did you tell her the truth? Did you apologize humbly, as I advised you, for being in such bad company that night at Wilcocks's?"

"I told Miss Marsland the truth about the past, the present, and, as far I was able to look forward, the future; and on the strength of that truth she rejected me."

"And you are contented that it should be so? You are happier in your mind now that you have broken with everybody who cares for you in the world?"

"I am singularly happy this evening, Mrs. Theobald. And I hope I have not broken quite with everybody who cares for me in the world?"

"You are a fool!" says Jane, a little sadly. "It seems to me, sometimes, that every man and woman on the earth is a fool. What we can't have we want: what we can have we don't care for."

"Then our best wisdom is to apply to ourselves

the French axiom," remarks Rawdon; "'*Quand on n'a pas ce qu'on aime, il faut aimer ce qu'on a.*'"

The words are not out of his mouth before Jane bursts into one of her wildest laughs. To talk sentiment, as Rawdon has already found to his cost, is, at all times, to tread on thinnest ice, with this least sentimental of God's creatures.

"I think if I was dying it would make me laugh to hear you talk French! 'Ce qu'ong aime! Ce qu'ong a!' I wonder why all Englishmen have such a ridiculous accent?"

"For the same reason, probably, that they know nothing about flounces and bonnets, and tread on their own toes when they dance," says Rawdon; his old animus on the subject reviving on the instant.

"Probably," remarks Jane, coolly. "Well, these things are their misfortune, not their fault. It is not given to every man to be——"

"A Monsieur de Lansac, perhaps?" suggests Rawdon, as she hesitates.

In a second her face grows grave. "You are quite right there," she replies. "It is given to few men, indeed, to be a Monsieur de Lansac. Oh, how good it is to hear his name—to think of him only, in this horrid place, among all this horrid Chalkshire respectability!"

"Yes, that is a theme on which you are always warm!" Rawdon exclaims, bitterly.

"Warm? I should think I was warm! If you only knew how and why I first got to care for de Lansac!

I was nearly telling you once, that evening when"—she turns her head a little aside—"when Blossy found my silver amulet in your pocket. You remember?"

"Yes, I remember," says Rawdon, fixing his eyes coldly and sternly on her face. "The amulet I had the folly to rob you of!—the treasure which, as M. de Lansac's gift, was so inexpressibly precious to you!"

"'De Lansac's gift!' 'Inexpressibly precious!'" What nonsense are you talking now?" cries Jane, looking up at him with her unabashed blue eyes. "Did I ever tell you the locket was de Lansac's gift, pray?"

"I believed—certainly I believed, from the value you put upon it, that it must be so," answers Rawdon Crosbie.

"Then you believed wrong. See what comes of being overwise. Once, long ago, I lost that locket from my chain—it was in Paris—and de Lansac was with us. Well, I never was so wretched about anything in my life, and when we got it again, by paying at least three times its worth, de Lansac had my initials cut on it for me. That is the whole story of my 'inexpressibly precious treasure,' Mr. Rawdon Crosbie."

"I beg pardon, humbly, Mrs. Theobald. You must allow that it was not likely I should be able to evolve the story out of my own consciousness!"

"I don't know what you mean by 'evolving.' It isn't likely, blinded with prejudice as you are, that you should guess any truth about such a man as de Lansac. You know what he is, of course? Oh, I repeat," cries

Jane, "I repeat, how good it is to think of him, and of all the happy days we spent together, in this wretched place! A foreign adventurer—yes," giving weight to every syllable as though the Pippins were still her listeners, "a foreign adventurer, living about in Ems, Spa, Baden Baden—no particular principles; no particular country; no particular friends, relatives, or connections. An adventurer; for anything I know to the contrary—what would be styled, by people like you, a *chevalier d'industrie*."

Rawdon is silent. He cannot forget that the possible *chevalier d'industrie* was the intimate associate in Spa of Francis Theobald—Francis Theobald, who is dining with the Duke of Malta to-night; whom everyone in Chalkshire would call "friend," were they not choked off by the legitimacy of the bonds that knit him to Jane and Blossy.

"But I don't care a rush for all that," she goes on. "I don't care a rush whether people are reckoned virtuous or the reverse. If the wine suits my taste, I don't look at the label on the bottle. De Lansac saved Theobald once from ruin—could a man of the nicest honour have done more? And I shall love him to my life's end. You wouldn't care to hear how it happened, I suppose?"

"I care to hear anything in which you are deeply concerned, Mrs. Theobald."

"Well, I hadn't been married six months—we were spending the winter in Homburg—and one night, or rather one morning at daybreak. Theobald came

back home, and told me quietly that we were beggars. He had been at a dinner-party given by de Lansac at his lodgings, and after dinner they had played banco. I don't know the game myself; I never learnt, and I never will learn, one card from another, but I believe there is something in it, isn't there, that is called following your money? Theobald, it seems, had done this, and had followed it to such purpose as to lose every farthing we had in the world. I can't tell you how much that was. I was a little fool, just past sixteen. I knew no more about money then than Blossy knows now. But all was gone, he told me; yes, to our last hundred-franc note."

"And in M. de Lansac's pocket, naturally?" puts in Rawdon, as she pauses.

"In de Lansac's pocket, naturally. Theobald and he had got intimate during the winter. When we first knew him he lived in the same hotel where we lived; and after breakfast that morning—I can see it all, as if it happened yesterday—he came in to visit me. I was alone, and de Lansac put out his hand to me, English fashion, as I had taught him, and inquired in his usual friendly way for Monsieur Theobald.

"I blush, to this day I blush, when I think of my answer," goes on Jane. "Could he have the vileness to pretend friendship for us still? I asked him. From the first hour we met him he had caused everything to go wrong with my life. He had robbed me of my husband, had lured Theobald night after night to the gambling-table, and now that we were ruined, through

him, he had come here to exult and triumph over us in our misery!

“Poor de Lansac! He heard me out patiently, but with a face white as any stone. When I had done, spent all the boiling passion that was at my heart, and you know—no, I believe you don't know yet—what I can be when my blood is up: ‘Madame,’ said he, in his quiet polished way, ‘I think you are unjust in saying that any influence of mine has been wanted to give M. Theobald the taste for play. As regards the money that nominally changed hands last night,’ he added, ‘why the whole thing was a jest, a pleasantry. Your husband, madame, had dined too well, played—like a child, a madman,—but by good fortune his I.O.U.s found their way, all of them, into my pocket, and I have brought them back to him.’

“And as he said this, he took some bits of scribbled paper from his memorandum-book, folded them neatly, tore them across, then flung the torn pieces into the fire. That is the story of how I came to love de Lansac.”

Jane has moved from the tea-table in the course of her narrative, and stands now beside the wide-open window—stands there looking out with flushing cheeks, with moistened eyes, into the darkness. And, as she stands thus, Rawdon's suspicions on the subject of de Lansac begin to waver.

That she has told him the truth, in the main, he never doubts. Jane's worst enemy would find it hard

to suspect her of deliberate falseness. But is it the whole truth? Watching her fair flushed face, Rawdon Crosbie, with the self-torturing cleverness of jealousy, asks himself this question. Could de Lansac's generosity have been so purely disinterested? or did she hold his heart captive too (in this easy fashion she has of holding men's hearts captive), half-unconscious, careless at least, that she was doing so, and receiving his chivalrous devotion to her husband's interests as a matter of course?

"Theobald took it all—as Theobald takes everything," says Jane presently. "'Honour among thieves, my dear Jenny.'" Whenever Jane narrates she gets dramatic instinctively. You would think it was Theobald's lazy, pleasant, half-sarcastic voice that speaks. "'Honour among thieves. It's a proverb, the truth of which I have often doubted, my dear, but our friend's example shows that there may be something in it after all. De Lansac considers, evidently, that we are bound, as vagabonds, by a common freemasonry, and gives us the benefit of the guild.' So Theobald jested the obligation away at the time. Afterwards, when we got a little better off in the world again—Theobald has come into one or two windfalls, you know, but they've all managed to disappear the same way—he was able to be of use to de Lansac. If one wrote figures down upon a piece of paper we might be quits. But I think one can never cry quits really as regards an action like de Lansac's," says Jane. "More than that, I wouldn't like to cry it. I should be very sorry

to be rid of my debt, and all the gratitude and affection my debt has brought with it."

Her unashamed eyes, her steadfast voice, nay, the mere mention of that one word "affection," make Rawdon waver more and more. And still he does not yet light upon the truth. It may sound cynical, paradoxical, to say that the very last person men ordinarily dream of being jealous of is—a husband. But in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred I believe this to be the truth. Throughout Rawdon's relations with Jane—the first five minutes in the Spa ball-room over—Mr. Francis Theobald has, in truth, been a personage who has never troubled his thoughts at all. A clothes-wearing man, with a drawl, an eyeglass, a couple of inches of brain, a general talent for keeping conveniently out of the way—this, if he had been obliged to clothe his ideas on the subject with words, would probably have been Rawdon Crosbie's analysis of Jane's husband.

That such a nonentity, moral and social, could, after four years of marriage, fill a heart like Jane's "fuller than it could hold" of passionate love, is a contingency too wildly remote ever to have crossed young Rawdon's imagination.

"And so I hope," Jane goes on, "I hope you will never make spiteful speeches again about de Lansac. If you had been in a fitting temper to listen I should have told you all this long ago; yes, on that very evening when Bloss rescued my poor old silver amulet out of the hands of the Philistines——"

“The Philistines being——”

“Mr. Rawdon Crosbie, aye, for you are a Philistine, Rawdon, heart and soul, and you will be one till you die, the better for you. If you had kept my locket, some day or other Mrs. Rawdon Crosbie would have found it. ‘Who gave you this thing, sir? But I *insist* upon knowing’ (and now it is Miss Marsland’s voice that speaks). ‘It belonged to a woman once! Who was she? What was she? Where was she?’ ‘My dear, I scarcely remember; when I was a lad I had so many of these trifles,’ et cetera. And Mrs. Rawdon presents it to one of her numerous children to hang round the cat’s neck.”

“Yes, that is all so likely. It is so perfectly certain that Mrs. Rawdon Crosbie will ever exist! In the meantime, Mrs. Theobald, though you have put the subject aside very dexterously, I think you have not told me the romance about the locket itself?”

“Did I promise to tell it you? I certainly don’t remember doing so. However, as it seems you *will* have long-winded stories to-night, I suppose I may as well set your curiosity at rest. To begin with, then, there’s no romance at all. It was only . . . only the first present Theobald ever made me. I was walking along the Strand with him one evening before we were married, looking into the shops, and when we got to a jeweller’s window he asked me to choose whatever I liked there for myself. I wouldn’t have taken any expensive present from him; I can’t tell you why—perhaps because I’d seen so much of what ex-

pensive presents came to with other people. But this little locket was secondhand, and ticketed 'seven shillings only,' so I said it was just the sort of thing I wanted, and he went in and bought it for me."

Jane's eyes are downcast now, her tongue falters, her breast heaves. And in this moment Rawdon Crosbie first discovers the secret, the anomaly of her life—she is in love with Theobald still!

CHAPTER XI.

Mr. Theobald follows up his Luck.

SUCH, reader, is the real, true unvarnished history of this memorable Saturday evening. Half an hour later young Rawdon, musing much on the fatuous constancy and much on the painful want of discrimination to be met with in woman's nature, is on his road back to the station. Half an hour later Mrs. Theobald stands blankly looking out into the wet dark night again, not a thought but the miserable ever-present one of Theobald and of her own corroding jealousy in her heart. But such is not the way that history is written by the wise heads of Liddington. The station-master's niece is Mrs. Pippin's housemaid, or the Theobalds' cook is first-cousin to Mrs. Coventry Brown's scullion—one need not be mathematically precise as to the channels through which parochial small-talk diffuses itself—

— “That small, small, imperceptible
Small-talk, which cuts like powdered glass
Ground in Tophana.”

“Rawdon Crosbie came down from London last night, expressly to call on Mrs. Theobald—her husband away from home, and she received him! But, then, what can you expect? Mrs. Pippin herself overheard her say, to the Duke of Malta of all men, that

‘nothing was against her principles;’ and, which made it additionally awkward, dear Lydia was obliged to hear it, too. Still, Lydia Pippin is no child; Lydia Pippin must be seven-and-twenty if she’s a day.”

“For my part I don’t know what society is coming to. A young woman like Mrs. Theobald to receive a bachelor’s visit at such an hour of the night, and her husband absent!”

“Mrs. Theobald is in the habit of having bachelor parties in her husband’s absence. All actresses, it is well known, have these free manners!”

“Mrs. Theobald”—the story, like a snow-ball, acquiring bulk and consistency as it rolls—“Mrs. Theobald gave a large bachelor party last night, her husband absent; and, whatever his faults, poor creature, one must *feel* for Francis Theobald. Rawdon Crosbie and a party of young men and actresses (of free manners) came down to it by the express. Sure of it? Ah, we have our information from only too good a source. Mrs. Coventry Brown’s Sarah . . .” and so forth.

Coming out of church, people talk over the latest Theobald scandal in whispers. It reaches Mr. and Mrs. Crosbie. It reaches poor Emmy, who indeed has the news “broken” to her, with the sort of feline tenderness you may see shown to a disabled mouse, by Adonis Hervey. It reaches every house in the neighbourhood, excepting perhaps The Folly—an atmosphere unfavourable to the milk-and-water gossip which forms

strong meat to the unsophisticated palates of the Lidlington babes.

Along the primrose paths of The Folly, everything glides at its usual smooth and tranquil downhill pace. An opportune acquisition to Lady Rose's little household arrived last night, in the person of a certain well-known, somewhat too well-known, London celebrity—Colonel Desmond—an old and devoted friend of Miss Childers. "Poor Harry Desmond has got a wife somewhere about in the world, so people *can't* say anything spiteful about him and me," Loo will declare. "Delightful to enjoy one honest friendship without being suspected of base matrimonial motives;" and sauntering slowly at Harry Desmond's side among the roses and butterflies, or reclining in the shadiest of pagoda summer-houses, while Harry Desmond smokes and tells her the last news from town, right pleasantly does Loo improve the shining hours of this Sunday afternoon in Mr. Smylie's absence.

Lady Rose devotes herself exclusively to Theobald, and if she does not succeed in amusing him, keeps him at least from being more than negatively bored. Mr. Theobald is exceedingly sleepy to-day, if the truth be told. He was up late last night, Colonel Desmond and the Duke both being fond of a little play, and won largely, as you will often observe men to win at cards when they are letting the best stakes of life slip unheeded through their fingers. The temperature of The Folly gardens is delicious; the Duke's cigars are irreproachable; Lady Rose possesses that

excellent thing in woman, a low-pitched, soothing voice, and what she says is not of a nature to call for any brain exertion whatever in the way of replies. Under these favourable conditions Francis Theobald, veritable lotus-eater that he is, dreams through the hours from luncheon till dinner-time, unruffled in spirit, unvexed by any haunting thought of to-morrow, or of the domestic jars to-morrow is likely to bring with it.

He has, by nature, the fatalest short mental vision with which mortal was ever endowed. It is not that he will not look; the man *cannot* look beyond the present moment. He has drifted into this friendship, flirtation, intrigue—call it by what name you will—with Lady Rose, not caring for her; caring for Jane in his heart, as he has always done; but won by the French cook and round games, and the absolute dullness of Theobalds, and the necessity (necessity, that has brought many worthier men than he to grief) of doing something with one's evenings. And now, not knowing what he risks, not seeing whither he goes, behold him drifting farther and farther still!

Jenny lost her temper, both of them lost their tempers, about that ridiculous note yesterday; the way Lady Rose received it, Theobald at her side, was angelic—no other word befits the occasion. Wise for him to keep out of the way till the storm blows over, as it must do, like all other storms. Poor Jenny! As it is Sunday, she will be sure to have Brabazon, or Dolly Standish, or some other young fellow from the

Fort, to amuse her; and then she will have her finery for the races to think of, and the races themselves, and the race-ball on Wednesday . . . but no; everything unpleasant will be forgotten long before Wednesday—or so Mr. Theobald thinks.

At dinner, the Duke, who has been absent the best part of the afternoon, remarks, casually, that he was fortunate enough to find Mrs. Theobald at home when he called on her to-day, “and I am over head and ears in love with your daughter, Theobald,” adds his Grace pleasantly. “She has promised to marry me when she is eighteen, and her mamma consents. Do you?”

Mr. Theobald, thus addressed, puts up his glass, and with the most perfect equanimity in the world looks across the table into the Duke of Malta’s face: “I consent to whatever my wife tells me is best,” he remarks meekly. “In everything connected with domestic matters, I look upon myself simply as non-existent.”

Colonel Desmond, knowing pretty well the extent of his Grace’s admiration for Mrs. Theobald—for indeed the Duke of Malta is not over reticent in such matters—Colonel Desmond gives Theobald a curious kind of look and turns the conversation. Lady Rose and Loo Childers exchange glances.

At night the Duke is again a heavy loser. When Lady Rose proposes to Theobald that he should remain at Beaudesert till the morning of Wednesday, the race-day, it almost appears to him in the light of a

duty that he should follow up his luck and do so. But he must, of course, go over to Theobalds first, see his wife, and find out if her plans for the week will be disconcerted by his prolonged absence.

"Oh, that, of course," cries Lady Rose, wincing in spirit, but with her softest smile and voice, "and if you can only persuade Mrs. Theobald to have no better engagement and to dine with us to-day, do."

So, in the afternoon, Lady Rose's pony carriage is at Mr. Theobald's disposal, and he drives over to Theobalds. Jane is not at home.

"Missus have gone out for a walk, and Miss Blossy, too," Esther the housemaid, explains to her master, "and the Duke of Malta is with them, sir,"—in rather an awestruck tone, this. "The Duke of Malta called soon after Miss Blossy's dinner, and I heard missus say they might as well all walk over to Lidlington together."

Mr. Theobald receives the intelligence with perfect sweet temper, just a little relieved, perhaps, at being quit for the moment of domestic explanations. He inquires how Mrs. Theobald is, and Miss Blossy? then saunters, whistling, his hands in his pockets, into the breakfast room, and writes the following affectionate note, which he leaves, folded but unsealed, upon the table:—

"DEAREST JENNY:

"I am thinking of stopping at The Folly till Wednesday morning. Explain why, when we meet. I shall

come over in good time to drive with you and Min to the course.

“Your most attached husband,
“F. T.

“If there is anything to bring me back sooner, be sure you let me know. How about persuading Min to stay for the race-ball in the evening?”

Having done which, Francis Theobald feels that he has discharged every domestic and social duty that can possibly be expected of him; and with the lightened heart that ever waits on a conscience at ease with itself, goes back to Beaudesert and to Lady Rose Golightly for another couple of days.

CHAPTER XII.

The Right and Wrong of Things.

ALL grades and sections of Chalkshire society go, as we have seen, to the Liddington flower show: the serious-minded early, the carnal-minded late; the halters between ultra-fast and ultra-slow, the "Mr. Facing-both-ways" of John Bunyan, at the intermediate hour that corresponds with the vague and neutral-tinted hue of their philosophy.

But as regards the races it is otherwise. A clever hand may trim even here, but it must be with a difference. Thus, Mrs. Crosbie, while disclaiming all prejudice on the score of races *as* races—has not Mr. Crosbie for years consented to act as one of the stewards?—finds that the glare of the chalk soil on the Common has a tendency to affect the eyes, and (unless peradventure any persons of title offer her a seat in their carriage) makes a point of paying a round of distant visits with Emma on the race day. The Pippin family remain at home, and avoid subscribing to the fund, on principle, but watch the race-goers from behind their drawing-room window blinds, and think no evil of attending the race ball in the evening. Mrs. Coventry Brown considers it a duty to grace the course with her presence, but leaves *after the cup race*, a compromise the fine-drawn delicacy of which it would

be hard to overpraise. The absolutely impracticably unworldly set not only abjure horse-racing itself, but also the very sight of those who frequent the unhallowed sport—strictly keeping within doors for the day, and putting up the shutters of such windows as command a view, near or distant, of the Belial-thronged road.

And this is the set to which Francis Theobald's sisters belong. Great therefore is the shock occasioned to Thomas, the serious coachman, when, on the morning of August the first, in this particular year of grace 187—, he receives orders from Miss Charlotte Theobald's own fair lips to harness Diocletian and bring round the brougham! Thomas, with whom it is a primary article of faith that the servants in unworldly families should have the race-day to themselves, and to the quiet enjoyment of beer and skittles at adjacent public-houses!

However, what Miss Charlotte rules not even Thomas, a despot in his way, may gainsay. Round comes Diocletian's Roman nose, a quarter of an hour after the order is given, to the Miss Theobalds' front door, and forth, a minute later, emerge the two Miss Theobalds, black-robed, funereal-paced, with crape veils concealing their maiden faces from the profane eye of man.

"To my brother's. The shortest road," ejaculates Miss Charlotte, as Thomas, finger to hat, stands inquiring—his whole mental nature in a state of chaos—

as to which road he shall take. "To my brother's, I say. Are you deaf?"

And then away, with blinds closely drawn down, the sombre, old fashioned brougham starts off—*against* the tide of race-going vehicles—vans, farmer's carts, ginger-beer trucks, and the like—so not without peril to shafts and wheels and Thomas's temper, in the direction of Theobalds.

It is exactly half-past ten when Diocletian's melancholy head enters the great gates from the avenue; and the first thing that greets the Miss Theobalds is the vision of two summer-clad, youthful figures leaning forth, laughing and talking with resonant cheerfulness from the drawing-room window, a small voice within, by dint of the volume and spirit with which it is executing the 'Ten Little Nigger Boys,' giving the impression of a whole room full of uproarious company in the background.

The figures dart away, the 'Nigger Boys' have died into profoundest silence by the time the brougham comes to a standstill. But if Francis and his wife have any intention of denying themselves in this open and shameless manner to their own flesh-and-blood, Miss Charlotte Theobald thanks heaven she has sufficient moral courage, sufficient sense of right and duty, to circumvent their intentions!

"Your mistress *is* at home," she asserts, the moment Esther, the housemaid, opens the door. "Let me out of the carriage, Thomas. I saw Mrs. Theobald at the drawing-room window as we passed."

And straight from the brougham into the house and on to the drawing-room Miss Charlotte stalks, mutely followed, with deprecating steps, with various despondent little shakes of the head, by the elder sister.

What an altered house Theobalds has become, after only four weeks of misrule—a four weeks' reign of Bohemianism and anarchy! Its aspect makes Miss Charlotte choke, and brings tears to the milder eyes of Anne Theobald. Open windows and doors let in dust, draughts, sunshine, and general deterioration as they list. The indecent sound of a servant singing—singing over her work—may be heard from the kitchen. A tiny spade, with earth still clinging to it, a garden hat, a battered doll, indications of a child's untidy, ungovernessed life, are everywhere. An old smoking-cap of Mr. Theobald's is stuck, with a rakish air, on the venerable head of Blossy's friend the Mandarin. The very Cupids on the ceiling wear a dissipated and Bacchanalian aspect. Upon the drawing-room carpet shreds of muslin and ribbon lie thick as on the floor of a milliner's workshop. Odours of millefleurs and musk tell still of the "half-world" presence of Miss Minnie Arundel.

"And this is what Theobalds has sunk to!" says the elder Miss Theobald, throwing back her veil, and raising her handkerchief to her eyes. "And brought up to such principles as Francis was! In less than five weeks they have taken as many years' lawful wear out of the carpet."

"Theobalds, and all belonging to Theobalds, will sink a good deal lower yet," is Miss Charlotte's response. "Don't waste your tears, Anne, pray. You will have a worthier occasion for them, depend upon it, than a few dozen yards of spoilt carpet."

After this they relapse into silence, ceremoniously standing, each of them, as though they were in the house of an utter stranger, with lips and eyes set, with clasped hands rigid as stone; and at the end of two or three minutes' time Jane makes her appearance.

She wears no finery, has copied nothing from the simpering fashion-book dolls, after all. A white muslin dress, made up hastily by her own hands overnight, a sailor's hat trimmed with a band of blue ribbon, a pair of neatly-fitting primrose gloves—this is Jane's attire for the Chalkshire races; just the kind of holiday attire she would have been able to afford in the days before she ever saw Mr. Theobald, the days when an outing with Uncle Dick to Sydenham or Epping comprised all that the poor little ballet-child knew or could have imagined of possible terrestrial enjoyment.

Charlotte Theobald eyes her fixedly, and with cutting minuteness. An hour spent with Min, who came down by the earliest train this morning, determined to lose nothing of her holiday, an hour of Min's high spirits and lively heart-whole chatter, has given colour and animation to Jane's face. But the lines of the face have changed: the softness, the ineffable grace of earliest youth have fled, from it for ever since that evening, four weeks ago, when she

entered this very room, singing, laughing, full of careless undoubting trust in the future, upon her husband's arm.

A form of iciest handshaking is gone through between the sisters-in-law. Then, each seating herself upon the edge of a chair, and keeping frightfully, uncomprisingly upright, the Miss Theobalds ask after their brother. With a little flush of the cheek, Jane answers that Theobald has been staying away from home; whereupon Miss Charlotte, who knows accurately where he is, and how long he has been there, inquires into details.

"Theobald is staying at The Folly," says Jane, in a voice of tolerably well assumed unconcern. "He has been over there the last three or four days, with the Duke of Malta. But if you want to see him you will only have to wait a few minutes. Theobald is to be here in time to take my sister and me to the races."

A pause: Anne Theobald fidgets with her bonnet-strings, glances up at the demoralised Cupid, clears her throat, then begins some remark as to "the weather having cooled down since the rain, but——"

"I came here to speak to Francis on a *most disagreeable* subject," interrupts Charlotte, her eyes still rivetted on Jane's face. "But in his absence I suppose I must say what I have got to say to you alone. Indeed, I don't know but that it is best so. You are going to the races it appears. And to the race ball afterwards? So I conclude." A sniff for every full

stop. "Anybody can go there who likes. There are never any Lady Patronesses for the race ball."

"Well, as far as I'm concerned, that is a great advantage," says Jane, bravely. "Lady Patronesses remind me of Ladies' Committees, and Ladies' Committees remind me of blackballing."

"I should have thought you would require nothing to remind you of that! Ahem. It is four weeks last Saturday since you and Francis entered this house."

"Four weeks last Saturday!" echoes Jane; bitterly recollecting what new experiences of life she has gained during those four fatal weeks.

"I said to my brother then, in your presence, that as long as you remained in the neighbourhood I hoped we should never have cause for painful discussions on any subject. In hoping this I was a fool. Mrs. Francis Theobald," bringing out each syllable with cruel stinging emphasis, "do you, can you, by any effort, should you think, bring yourself to understand the meaning of the word 'disgrace?'"

Forth flashes the mutinous spirit from Jane's blue eyes. "If I understand? Upon my word I don't know what you are talking about. If I understand the meaning of plain English? To the best of my belief—yes."

("We have lived in Chalkshire for more than two hundred years," interpolates the elder Miss Theobald, plaintively, "and respected by everybody, high and low. I'm sure when poor mamma died we sent out more than one hundred and twenty visiting cards of

thanks for inquiries, and all the people of the humbler class besides.")

"Because, if you do, you will want little enlightening as to the motive of our visit. The Theobalds, for generations past, have borne a good name, and kept up an honourable position in this county. You have lived here exactly four weeks and three days, and in those four weeks and three days have succeeded in dragging our name and our honour into the mud."

"I!" exclaims Jane, every nerve in her body tingling with sudden passion. "I!"

"Yes, you. But if you will hear me to the end, if you will have the goodness to command yourself, you will find that I do my best to judge you righteously. You don't belong—plain speaking in a matter like this is quick speaking—you don't belong in any way to the world that condemns you here. And I try to believe, for my brother's sake, and from a sense of my obligations as a Christian, I try to believe that the scandal you have occasioned has been brought about partly through ignorance. As a Christian, I say, I try to believe this."

"You are most considerate, I'm sure," exclaims Jane, with quivering lips.

"My sister of course, was for going to the seaside—shirking the pain of our position, as persons of a certain disposition do shirk all responsibilities, and leaving things to take their chance. But I," says Miss Charlotte, with animus, "am no coward! I will never shirk a trial, however dark, that Providence in its

wisdom may choose to send me. Whatever you do, to whatever you may sink, you will still be my brother's wife. And I shall no more think myself entitled to disown you than if your conduct were honest, your reputation unsullied."

At the word "honest" Jane Theobald rises to her feet. She rises, stands before her sisters-in-law erect, and speaks out her answer thus. Jane has great dramatic power by nature. Her attitude, her face, are at this moment really fine. Every syllable she utters, though her voice is scarcely raised to common speaking-pitch, falls with extraordinary point and power on her hearers' ears.

"I do not belong to your world, you say, to the world of your Chalkshire society! No, I do not. I belong by birth, by bringing-up, by every strongest affection I have, to the class of poor, hard-working people—strolling actors, orchestra-people, ballet-girls, vagabonds of all kinds. I say this with pride. As far as want of hypocrisy can entitle any man or woman to the name 'honest,' my world is an honest one, far, than the world of Chalkshire society."

At these fearful words the elder Miss Theobald feels herself actually to shrivel. She has the narrowest bit of a soul that ever mortal absorbed in contemplation of its own gastric imperfections possessed: is not so much intolerant towards, as utterly incomprehensive of the wants, and sorrows, and frailties of lives alien to her own. That ballet-girls, strolling actors, and other dreadful vagrant creatures of the kind exist,

Anne Theobald knows to be a fact, a dark but undeniable fact. That such creatures should seek to justify their existence, feel no shame in it, unblushingly exalt it above a recognised, clerically-organised, aristocratically-headed county society, literally stuns her!

"We should have done much better to go to Scarborough—I told you so, Charlotte, and Mrs. Adams' lodgings not let! I told you any attempt at interference on our part would be worse than useless."

"You always tell me that what involves exertion to yourself will be worse than useless, Anne," says Miss Charlotte, with an expression of verjuice. "Pray, if we are not going to stand by our brother's wife in her downfall, who will stand by her? What's the use of kneeling and bemoaning our lot as miserable sinners in church every Sunday, if we abandon the miserable sinners most nearly connected with our own family to their fate?"

Jane's face becomes as red as fire. "Really, before this agreeable conversation goes any further, I think I must beg for a little enlightenment," she cries. "Evidently I am the miserable sinner you speak of with such relish. In what consists my sin? What is my 'dishonesty' of conduct? What is the 'scandal' I have occasioned in the neighbourhood?"

The muscles round poor Anne Theobald's dust-coloured lips twitch convulsively. "We are sorely chastened, but we should have accepted the chastise-

ment humbly," she remarks. "We should have done better, far, to go to Scarborough!"

"What you ask is natural," says Miss Charlotte, addressing Jane with cold equity. "I wish to be just to all men. I will repeat to your face, *verbatim*, what is said of you behind your back. In the first place there were the discreditable circumstances attending your meeting with the Crosbies in Spa. That stamped you to begin with. Next came your intimacy here with young Rawdon Crosbie—at that time an engaged man—though unvisited by the ladies of the family. You were then seen with him, I believe with some person of your own connection, at a public supper-room in London. And then you were blackballed by the Lidlington Croquet Club."

Anne Theobald's lips again murmur forth something. But the words "Mrs. Adams" and "Scarborough" are alone audible.

"On Saturday evening last, Rawdon Crosbie came down from London and (not going near his own people), visited you, here, between the hours of eight and ten, your husband absent. It is also said that the Duke of Malta is becoming a constant visitor at your house."

Miss Charlotte pauses, a little out of breath.

"But still, of what am I accused?" asks Jane, not moving from her position. "All this I take to be the prologue—the opening flourish. Of what am I accused?"

"You are accused of conduct unbefitting your

name and our brother's station!" cries Anne Theobald, for once in her life startled into decision. "And I did think you would have received our visit in a better spirit—we, who have never had the carriage out on a race-day before. . . . I'm sure Thomas must have thought of poor Mamma as he drove us along—but of course we know there is such a thing as Higher Duty. Any one of the actions my sister has named is sufficient justification to Society for its verdict on you. No one ought, no one could, visit a woman setting public opinion at nought as you do."

"No one does visit me," says Jane, coolly. "Society has told me pretty plainly that I don't belong to it: I ask to be judged by something a little higher than Society's opinions."

"A little higher!" gasps Anne Theobald, faintly.

"Yes, a little higher. I ask to be judged by the right and wrong of things. In the world I come from we may be lax, we *are* lax of conduct, most of us, and we know it. But what is wrong for one is wrong for all. What is right for one is right for all. We don't shut our eyes in some cases and open them in others. You, ladies and gentlemen by birth, our betters, our masters, have, it seems, a sliding scale—a very sliding scale," cries poor Jane, "of virtue! What was my first sin against Chalkshire respectability? That I was not a certain dilapidated old foreign princess that Mrs. Crosbie wished to scrape acquaintance with at Spa. My second? That I and my sister, an actress, were not ashamed to be seen at a supper-room in

London, where Mrs. Crosbie was not ashamed to be seen herself. My third? That the Lidlington Croquet Club blackballed me! The Lidlington Club that, they say, has long striven in vain for the honour of having a Lady Rose Golightly amongst its members. And this is justice!”

She laughs, a scornful miserable little laugh enough, and the elder Miss Theobald rises from her chair.

“I think you might have spared us this,” she cries, in a trembling voice. “Dispute the first principle of morality — call wrong right and right wrong if you choose. You might at least, I think, abstain from maligning the society you have outraged.”

“And I,” says Miss Charlotte, laying a thin hand on each of her knees, “I think it would be much better, Anne, if all this useless talk on abstract subjects were left on one side. What justice is there in the world, I should like to know? None! There’s a law for the rich and a law for the poor. A law for men and a law for women. A law for the well-born, a law for those who are not. We are as much hypocrites here in Chalkshire as anywhere else. But all that has nothing to do with the common-sense of things. I will not talk goody talk on a question that I know to be one of expediency. Lady Rose Golightly may do as she chooses, and float still, as she has always floated, because she is Lady Rose Golightly. If you,” turning harshly to Jane, “continue to act as you are acting now, you’ll go to the Dickens! Take my warning, or leave it. I have fulfilled my duty; and I am

ready to stand by you if I can. Anne, we may return home." And with a more vigorous sniff than usual, Miss Charlotte Theobald starts to her feet; then, followed closely and in silence by the elder sister, moves towards the door.

With her heart swelling until the sensation is one of agony, Jane stands and watches them. Harsh, unwomanly, unpitying though Charlotte Theobald may be, Charlotte Theobald's *is*, she feels, the one human hand outstretched upon this earth to save her. And she half yearns to grasp it! Miss Theobald's cold platitudes did but kindle her into fiercer rebellion: the coarse sincerity of Miss Charlotte's, "You are going to the Dickens!" has all but pierced her heart. "I—I am sorry Theobald is not at home," she cries, a visible tremour in her voice.

"I am sorry for it, too," says Charlotte, with bitter emphasis. "I am sorry your husband does not keep at home. Excuses enough are made for his conduct by the world: not by me. Placed as you are, young, ignorant as you are, I say—though I know I stand alone in my opinion—that Francis's sin is the greater of the two."

At these words, words probing to the bottom that hidden, cruellest wound under which she languishes, Jane remains mute; the colour leaving her cheek, her eyes fixed intently, piteously, upon Charlotte Theobald's hard face.

"Don't—don't say anything against Theobald, please," she falters out at last.

"Oh, I say nothing against anybody," answers Charlotte, tartly. "I confine myself to facts. Lady Rose was the ruin of his youth. All the world knows that. After Lady Rose Beaudesert jilted him, Francis never cared a straw again for his family or his honour, or what became of either. She will be the ruin of him now. Men never outlive these idiotic sorts of infatuation!" cries Miss Charlotte, with an angry sniff over the generalisation.

"I'm sure I wish Francis would let the house, and go away somewhere," says the elder sister, Jane remaining silent and passive under this new form of attack. "It was a dreadful mistake, his ever returning to a neighbourhood where he was known. Whichever way one turns one sees nothing but unpleasantness. Whichever way one turns disgrace . . ."

. . . Looks one suddenly straight in the face, in the gaily-drest, smiling person of Miss Minnie Arundel! "Theobald has come, Jenny!" cries Min, bursting into the room, with the most delightful self-possession and good-temper. "He drove up by the stable-road, and has gone to change his coat, and where can I find him some blue gauze for his hat? Theobald says we shall not have much time to lose."

The severe goddess of good taste has not, it must be confessed, presided over Miss Minnie Arundel's race attire. It is a rare thing, indeed, for the poor little hardworked actress to get a holiday, except on Sunday, and when she does get one she celebrates it by as elaborate a display of finery as her finances for

the time being enable her to command. Flounces, furbelows, paniers, the latest absurdity of a Regent Street bonnet, jewels of different kinds on throat and wrist, pearl powder, millefleur, patchouli! What an apparition to enter the stately drawing-room, to stand beneath the hallowed, carved ceiling of Theobalds! Our brother's wife is, alas, an actress; but indirectly; by training only. Here is the veritable thing, fresh—or faded, as you will—from the footlights of last night, surrounded by the very living, breathing, corruption of the atmosphere of the stage.

Charlotte Theobald gives her an acrid stare, just as she would give an acrid stare to any woman younger, fairer, happier than herself. The soul of Anne Theobald is, if I may use the irreverent metaphor, literally taken off its legs. After regarding life, on principle, for half a century as a respectable but melancholy process through which the human race has to moulder, patiently dyspeptic, into another world, now to be brought into closest contact, under one's very roof-tree, with—an actress! A creature "with borrowed colour and curl," whose business it is, professionally, to put a false light and glitter and gloss on human life, and whose triumphs consist in enabling men, for a brief space, to forget the tomb, indigestion, and other conditions of mortality; a creature with "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," for her acknowledged motto; and whose place in the great scheme of a decorously-organised universe is nowhere! I say, to be thrown thus suddenly across this living, over-drest,

pearl-powdered antithesis to every belief and prejudice of her being, takes Anne Theobald's tottering soul off its legs.

"Come, Charlotte, come;" she gasps, putting her hand on her sister's arm, as if for support. "We have been here too long already."

But Charlotte Theobald walks back a step, and looks once more into Jane's face. "Good-bye to you," she says, and gives her her thin right hand. The word heartiness would be misapplied to any action of Charlotte Theobald's; but there is honesty, a certain kind of remote sympathy, even, in its grip. "It isn't likely I should pay another visit to Theobalds under present circumstances, but when you want a friend, mind what I say, when you want a friend, and the time may come sooner than you think—you'll know where to find one."

And then the sisters depart.

This is the last compromise between Jane's two lives; her last cold, hand-shake, so to speak, with the world of conventionality to which she was not born, and which, from this day forth, shall be burthened by her presence no more.

CHAPTER XIII.

Wives—and Husbands!

A BROILING sun overhead, dust in your eyes, nostrils, throat; men with blackened faces and banjos; small girls in dingy spangles holding forth tin cups, with shrill professional whine; dishonest directors of itinerant roulette boards; honest country merchants of cholera-ripe plums and apples; the bill vendors with their "Cards of the running 'orses, weights, name, *and* colours of the riders;" the mob, with its hoarse throat, ever ready to yell down the latest failure, or to yell in the latest success (like some other more highly cultivated mobs). Is not the description of one race-course the description of all?

To Miss Minnie Arundel the day is one of unalloyed delight. She loves, she doats on races at all times, and has quite an amazing little stock of "horsey" expressions, which she fits in, generally upside-down, to show her knowledge of everything that is going on to the young men with whom she talks. But the delights of the Chalkshire race-course, exceed any that she has tasted even on the classic ground of Epsom, Ascot, or Goodwood. Officers of all grades of the service, London swells, and even titles of moderate rank, have held Miss Arundel's champagne-glass and lost gloves to her before now. Never until this first

day of August, 187—, and upon this Chalkshire race-course, did she taste the supreme ecstatic sweets of a duke's attention!

Actresses are but mortal, very mortal, and when we consider that every lady, young and old, here present would welcome the Duke of Malta's attendance by her carriage side in breathless triumph, we should really be lenient in our judgments upon poor Min.

"Am I to call him my Lord Duke, or your Highness, or what, Jenny?" she whispers to Jane, after the first flurry of introduction. "These things may all come easy enough to you, with Theobald for a coach, but remember I never spoke to anything higher than a baronet in my life."

"Call him what you like, my dear," is Jane's answer; "so long as you take him off my hands. Only, don't let him go, Min! We may not enjoy ourselves particularly. That we can't help. But ours shall be the best attended carriage on the race-course. Don't let the Duke go."

And well does Miss Arundel succeed in carrying out the letter and spirit of the injunction. While private carriages stand in a row, their occupants neglected, Francis Theobald's hack sociable is surrounded. Not once during the day, save so far as a cat may allow a mouse to get back its liberty, is the duke let go.

This is how women of Jane's temperament walk on to perdition. Their hearts may be breaking with love or jealousy; Jane's heart is breaking to-day! But they will show a brave front before the transgressor,

before their sisters, before the world. If they are to die, it shall be in harness. Some vanity shall be gratified, some duke shall not be "let go" till the last.

What cares Jane in truth for the Duke of Malta, Colonel Mauleverer, Brabazon—for any of the men whom by a smile, a word, a look, she manages to keep in attendance? Why, if she followed inclination, she would sooner talk to young Rawdon than to any of them—Rawdon, jealously hovering round, but seldom approaching her carriage—sooner still, would be left alone. If she were alone must not Theobald, of very necessity, keep by her side? Ah, but the Chalkshire world is looking at her; Mrs. Coventry Brown's carriage is actually next to the hack sociable; Lady Rose Golightly's not twenty yards distant. And Theobald himself—shall not Theobald be taught, by his own vision, that though he neglect her, other men do not, that let his faithlessness, his indifference, be what they may, the means of reprisal lie, fatally ready, to her hand?

Theobald, during the early part of the day at least, keeps aloof from Lady Rose Golightly's carriage, and near his wife's. Whatever anger he felt against poor Jenny for her obstinacy about the note, died before Lady Rose's dinner reached its second course last Saturday. He drove up to Theobalds this morning in the perfectly affectionate and conciliatory frame of mind that good husbands are wont to feel after short absences from home. And Jane's reception of him, Jane's changed face, the way in which, Miss Arundel

being present, she tolerated, but shrank from his kiss, have touched him much more deeply than Jane herself suspects.

As long as the world lasts the difficulty of women understanding and making allowance for men's feelings, in matters pertaining to love, will probably be one of the great sources of darkness and confusion in the social arrangement of things. A woman loving a man, Jane loving Francis Theobald, *could not*, after a quarrel, exist three days away from him (two miles distant) and seek no reconciliation. But Francis Theobald, who loves Jane quite as much, I should say, as most men love their wives, has not only existed unreconciled, but happy; nay, has very nearly forgotten that the quarrel ever took place. The renewal of his old flirtation with Lady Rose has amused Mr. Theobald a little; his écarté with Lady Rose's brother has amused him a good deal more. The French cook, the wines, the general lotos-eating life of Beaudesert's Folly have, in every way, been an agreeable episode to befall one in these Chalkshire wilds. Still, what—so Mr. Theobald would argue—what has any of this got to do with Jane?—his sweet and blooming Jane, *his* wife, *his* property? As well think he would love Blossy less because he had been amusing himself pleasantly for a few days away from home! But how bring the property, above all, if it be property of Jane's illogical temper, to understand this?

Mr. Theobald keeps near his wife's carriage; more

than once, when a vacancy occurs, gets possession of a place beside Jane.

"Forgive me, Jenny," he whispers to her at last, several little jests and complimentary speeches on her appearance having fallen blankly to the ground; "I see you are angry about something or another—forgive me!"—holding out a lavender-gloved hand that the crowd sees not, but that Jane sees, of reconciliation.

In every quarrel of their lives, hitherto, Mr. Theobald has not needed to sue long for pardon. A word, a look of his, has been enough to bring Jane, always, with passionate repentance, to his arms. But jealousy, save of the most trivial and ridiculous nature, has never been the cause of their dissensions till now.

"I don't know what you mean by 'forgive'." She lowers her parasol, so that no one but Theobald can see her face or hear her voice. "You have taken your way, I shall take mine. It's too late in the day to talk about forgiveness now."

"Jenny! Too late ever to talk of forgiveness between you and me?"

Every fibre of her heart thrills to his voice. If they were alone, instead of with these thousands of eyes around them, who knows but that salvation might come to her, even yet?

"Jenny, my love, before the day is over, you'll promise to forgive me—won't you?" And Mr. Theobald's hand shifts his position, and, accidentally or otherwise, touches his wife's arm.

Such miracles as take place around us, to which

no one gives heed! Here, under the open eyes of Chalkshire, is a tender little love scene going on between man and wife, between Mr. and Mrs. Theobald, of all couples in the world!

“I cannot forgive without conditions . . .” says poor Jane, her breath coming thick and fast——

“——Mrs. Theobald, what do you say to lunch?” asks the old Colonel’s chirpy Irish voice. “Sorry to disturb you, Theobald—thanks.” Mr. Theobald, like a well-bred husband, retiring the moment his place is wanted. “If you and Miss Arundel are ready to honour us with your presence? The cup race won’t come off for another half-hour, and this is the hottest time of the day. It will refresh you to get under shelter.”

Colonel Mauleverer opens the door of the sociable. Jane and her sister descend, and walk down the course to the tent of the regiment, some twenty or thirty yards distant. Jane is escorted by Colonel Mauleverer, the Duke of Malta on her other side; Brabazon brings Miss Minnie Arundel. Certainly they are the two “best attended” women on the course. The moral sense of Chalkshire is scandalised by this flagrant setting at nought of public opinion. Young men, in these days, seem to have forgotten the A B C of good manners. Impossible for a regiment to receive more attention than has been received by this one from families of the highest standing in the neighbourhood. And see the return they make for it! Persons of unenviable notoriety openly invited to lunch before a lady present

has received an invitation! Will anyone enter the regimental marquee *second* to Mrs. Francis Theobald and her sister? On this point the moral sense of Chalkshire maintains wise silence until the moment of temptation comes.

The marquee is just a degree or two hotter than the race-course; but the lunch, the iced champagne, are unexceptionable, and Min is soon in a seventh heaven of demonstrative enjoyment. A colonel of a regiment cutting her chicken, a duke replenishing and again replenishing her champagne glass! Can life have any brighter half-hour in store for Miss Minnie Arundel! If Blanche Bolingbroke, who boasts so ridiculously of the one lord of her acquaintance, could but see her! But there is a single drop wanting in every cup of mortal happiness.

"You are eating nothing, Mrs. Theobald," says kind little Captain Brabazon, who has made his way to Jane's side. "I'm afraid this blackhole of ours is too hot for you. Come over by the doorway, where you'll have more air."

"I don't know what you mean by 'nothing,'" says Jane. "I've been eating steadily ever since I came. Lobster salad? Well, if there's one temptation more than another that's too strong for me, it's lobster salad—just the smallest help, though."

"And come over by the doorway. You will have as much draught as you like there."

"Yes, by Jove, it's the only cool place going," cries that most foolish of ensigns, Dolly Standish,

edging up to Jane as Brabazon goes away with her plate. "I haven't been able to speak to you to-day, Mrs. Theobald; other fellows never gave me a chance. Theobald coming to lunch with us, I hope? Oh! no, there he is, opposite, in Lady Rose's carriage."

Jane raises her eyes, and blushes as though she were convicted of a crime. Yes, there is Theobald, placidly eating his chicken and drinking his champagne in the society of Lady Rose, Colonel Desmond, and Loo Childers, to outward seeming as well-assorted a little party of four as could be found upon the race-course.

"I take it for granted that you will belong to us at the races to-morrow?" Lady Rose said to Theobald when she parted from him last night. It was settled that he must leave Beaudesert at an hour next morning, when not the very warmest friendship could make Lady Rose Golightly visible. "Although you say differently, you must remember that I look upon you as my guest still, and I take it for granted that you will lunch with us at the races to-morrow."

And Theobald, who through Brabazon had already heard of Jane's engagement, answered with a dubious "Yes." He was not responsible, no head of a family could be responsible, for what might happen in any given interval. But if the Fates proved favourable, and if everybody lived, and if Lady Rose remained of the same mind still, he would be charmed.

Well, everybody has lived, and Lady Rose has remained of the same mind, and the Fates, it may be

assumed, have proved favourable. At all events, he is "her guest" still.

How could it be otherwise? When Jane and Miss Arundel, with their staff of attendants, walked away to the marquee, what was Theobald to do? Keep guard over the empty carriage till their return! Form an insignificant unit in the train of his wife's admirers! Jealous wives forget the positions into which their own love of attention, their own levity, may force the most exemplary husbands. The only course open to Mr. Theobald was to saunter up to Lady Rose; be met with honey-sweet smiles of welcome; finally, under gently imperious command, take his place in her carriage, have a snowy white damask placed over his knees, and eat, drink, and be merry, as his wife is doing in the regimental marquee almost immediately opposite.

"I would go and ask Theobald to join us, only he looks so happy where he is," says the foolish ensign. "A pity to disturb people when they are happy."

"A thousand pities!" cries Jane, her eyes kindling. "Particularly when every one else is happy too."

She eats her lobster salad when Captain Brabazon brings it to her, takes a glass of champagne—another; begins to be in spirits. Her clear outringing laugh makes itself heard across the course as far as Lady Rose Golightly's carriage.

"Our friends in the marquee seem to be having a *very* jovial party. I feel quite jealous at not being invited," says Lady Rose.

Her tone is the perfection of well-bred amiability. And still the “very” is italicised! Still, the next time poor Jane’s laugh rings aloud, its merriment jars with a degree of discordance in Mr. Theobald’s ears. However contented he may be in great things, however callous to the world’s moral disapproval of his choice, a man who has married beneath him is never quite without some trivial vulnerable points. Lady Rose surely ought to know enough of human nature generally, and of Francis Theobald’s nature in particular, to be aware of this.

CHAPTER XIV.

A Daylight Orgie.

ONCE during the day, generally immediately before the cup race, it is a received Chalkshire opinion that ladies, well escorted, may be seen, for a quarter of an hour or so, on foot. Accordingly, while Jane and her sister are still in the marquee, some half-dozen of the Chalkshire notabilities pass backward and forward along the course; among them Mrs. Coventry Brown, with Mr. Crosbie—papa, not Rawdon—for her attendant swain.

The race day is the one day of the year on which Mr. Crosbie is allowed to take his pleasure abroad as a bachelor and "*moult tristement*," that pleasure is taken, if one may judge from the sombre expression of his honest red-and-tan old English face to-day.

The thermometer at the present hour of the afternoon stands at about a hundred and ten in the sun; and Mrs. Coventry Brown's too solid flesh is rapidly suffering decrease of tissue through evaporation. Her peach-coloured gloves—cruel enemies to Mrs. Coventry Brown, at all times, are kid gloves—seem to have grown a couple of sizes smaller than when she left home this morning; the white tulle that envelopes her face becomes gelatinous; her brow is bedewed, her complexion redder than the roses in her bonnet. She

is glad of any excuse to give her bulky limbs pause in their walk, and an excuse fortunately presents itself, in the hum of convivial voices, the peals of hearty laughter, that are issuing from the regimental marquee just as she and Mr. Crosbie pass along.

“A very uproarious party, upon my word—and of both sexes! But that’s the worst of races, Mr. Crosbie. I always leave my own gurls at home. In my position, as a head of society, I’m obliged to patronise the public amusements of the neighbourhood, but I always say a race-course is no place for the young and innocent.”

“So people tell me,” says old Crosbie. “So people tell me, Mrs. Brown. For my part, I think all places are much the same. Everything depends upon the spirit you look at them in.”

“Ah, my dear Mr. Crosbie”—the big blonde head gives a Lord Burleigh shake under its superimpendent flower-garden—“that may be all very well, my dear friend, for you and me; but the young, the young, alas! are only too open to corrupt influences. Now, what”—Mrs. Coventry Brown’s voice lowers, her great yellow eyes glare with feline fixity before her—“what do you call a scene like this?”

“Well, ma’am, I believe I should call it a rather noisy lunch party,” says Mr. Crosbie, glancing towards the officers’ tent and at a certain girlish figure that stands, with fair flushed face, a champagne glass in her hand, just within the entrance.

“And I,” says Mrs. Coventry Brown, “should call

it a orgie! Yes, a daylight orgie! Mr. Crosbie, you are a steward of these races. Then allow me to tell you this: I have seen the cup run for, as a dooty, and subscribed handsome to the race fund for years; but if this kind of thing is going to be tolerated publicly . . . how do you *do*, dear Lady Rose,” in a parenthesis of eager smiles, the great yellow eyes having succeeded in arresting a languid look of recognition from Lady Rose Golightly: “Miss Childers, delighted to see you looking so well . . . if this kind of loose manners is going to be tolerated publicly, Mr. Crosbie, the sooner persons of character withdraw their patronage from the Chalkshire races the better.”

She returns to her carriage, but keeps Mr. Crosbie in solemn conversation for another five or six minutes after she has entered it; and when the poor old fellow leaves her, his face betokens pretty clearly what kind of agreeable utterances the oracle has been giving forth. He takes a turn or two along the course, his hands behind him, his eyes moodily fixed on the ground, then walks up abruptly to his son (who, as Mrs. Coventry Brown took care to point out, is always to be found in Jane's neighbourhood), and, for the first time to-day, addresses him point blank.

“I should be glad to have a few words with you, Rawdon, if you have five minutes to spare.”

“Five minutes or an hour,” answers Rawdon promptly. “It seems to me the races lag a little, father; don't you think so? Too long an interval between each race—or what is it?”

Old Crosbie answers, crustily, that the races are conducted as they always have been and as they always will be, while he has anything to do with them. He wants no new-fangled opinions upon any matter that is under his control and management. However, he puts his hand, with a friendly enough gesture, within young Rawdon's arm, and thus linked together, the father and son walk away towards a quieter portion of the course.

Very glad the Chalkshire world is to see that they are upon *speaking terms* still. Mrs. Crosbie will not admit her son to her presence—did you not know that? Oh dear, yes—he has not been near The Hawthorns, although, unhappily, he still comes into the neighbourhood! for a fortnight past—becomes hysterical if his name is even mentioned. And no wonder. Thirty thousand pounds, and as nice a girl as Emma, transferred, by the lad's own folly, to that ridiculous old Major Hervey. But the father it seems, is more lenient—hopes still, perhaps, to patch matters up. At all events, it is a relief, a very great relief, to the charitable dispositions of the Chalkshire world, to see that poor Mr. Crosbie and his son speak still!

“Rawdon,” says Mr. Crosbie, as soon as they find themselves among the ginger-beer stalls and Aunt Sallies of the back regions, and well beyond the range of friendly listening ears, “this is not the time or place I should have chosen for speaking to you; but as you don't come to my house I have no choice left, and

what I have to say won't take very long. You are making a confounded idiot of yourself, sir!"

Rawdon is silent. From the time he was five years old he has been in the habit of disputing first principles with Mrs. Crosbie. With his father, his kindly, honest, narrow-minded, unintellectual, old father, Rawdon is never able to find a word of argument.

"Yes, a confounded idiot! A confounded idiot!" Eloquence is not a natural gift of Mr. Crosbie's. "I am no more straight-laced than other men. You have never found me backward in indulgence towards any of your follies; no, nor in money either; and from the first, as I told your mother, I thought you too young to be engaged. Still, it was your own doing. You chose to propose to Emma, and she accepted you. Well, I won't talk of the delicacy or the generosity you should have felt towards a girl placed as she is in our house. Common manly feeling, common self-respect, might have made you behave yourself with *decency* as her lover."

"I was unaware that I had not behaved myself with decency," says Rawdon, but in no very firm voice. "Emma and my mother have taken up prejudices which I refuse to share; just that."

"It is not 'just that' at all," says old Crosbie, angrily. "For God's sake, let us have none of your fine rhodomontade hair-splitting, sir! Stick to the course you have taken, if you will. Don't defend it. This woman you have chosen to run after——"

"Say nothing against her!" cries Rawdon, flushing.

“Say what you like of me, but not a word against her!”

“Have the civility to hear me out if you please, and you will find that I am going to say nothing against ‘her!’ This woman you have chosen to run after may, or may not, be what the neighbourhood says she is. The subject is one I’ve no interest in. As long as you were your own master you might have made a fool of yourself with her or any other woman you liked, and I should have trusted to time to give you wisdom. But an engaged man is not his own master. From the day in Spa on which you asked Emma to marry you you were bound in honour to respect her feelings, and on that very day, it seems, you fell into this—entanglement. Now, what is the end of it? What is your position? What is the position of all of us at this moment?”

“My position,” says Rawdon, with an uneasy attempt at a laugh, “is that of a jilted man. You must be aware—my letters to you must have made you aware—that the breaking off of the engagement was Emma’s doing, solely.”

“Emma’s doing, solely! Would she—would any girl of spirit—remain bound to a man who openly, grossly, showed his indifference to her as you did? I don’t talk of what happened in London,” goes on Mr. Crosbie, who is not more ultramontane than other people as to the sinfulness of little sins; “I don’t talk of their coming across you at those confounded supper-rooms where that donkey, Hervey, should never have

taken them, though that was bad enough in the eyes of an innocent girl like Emma; I speak of what happened before—the way in which you philandered after the woman here in Chalkshire, with Emma breaking her heart about you at home.”

“Breaking her heart! Well, sir, you must allow at least that the wound has quickly healed! If Emma, in a fortnight, can derive comfort from Major Hervey’s attentions, you must allow that I have not been the means of completely destroying her happiness!”

Now, those two syllables “Hervey” embody all the bitterest slumbering animosities of Mr. Crosbie’s nature. For five and twenty years the poor man has been snubbed by the Herveys, has lent money to the Herveys, has been made to feel that if there be a point on which the Hervey glory *could* sustain tarnish or decrease, it has been in the connection of the family with himself. Rawdon’s dislike to them is hereditary; one of those far-reaching mysterious taints in the blood which no countertraining can eradicate.

“Major Hervey! Yes, do you think that lessens my regret over your folly? For the last ten days I’ve had the fellow staying in my house—he’s there, with Emma, now, afraid the heat on a provincial racecourse would be too much for his complexion, I suppose. For ten days I’ve had the fellow in my house, drinking my claret with that confounded sneer of his, till I hate the thought of dinner, on my soul I do! Hate the thought of sitting down at my own table! And now there’s the old woman coming—the two old women, by God!

Maria's the worst of the two. If Emma marries him, I shall never be able to call my house my own again, and through you, sir! Through you, you young jack-anapes! giving up as true and good-hearted a girl as ever lived, because you must needs make one in the train of a flaunting, flirting playactress, like this Mrs. Theobald!"

The rebuke is not couched in very dignified terms, but it cuts Rawdon's heart like a knife. A lad of his age may fall most insanelly, most unlawfully in love, without his whole moral nature tumbling to pieces. Affection for his father, dislike, jealousy, of the Herveys, are feelings that have grown with Rawdon's growth, strengthened with his strength. Never did either hold more powerful sway over him than in this very hour when the rupture with all his boyish life, his boyish life and its prejudices and affections, is so imminent.

"I repeat, that it was Emma herself who broke off the engagement," he says, a little sullenly. "You know the story from the first as well as I do. When we met Mr. and Mrs. Theobald in Spa, you did not share my mother's prejudices against them, sir. If I recollect right, you said you would leave your card on Francis Theobald and his wife when they returned to Chalkshire."

"And what prevented me from doing so but your disgraceful conduct?" cries old Crosbie, angrier than ever. Like all men under petticoat government, he winces sorely at any allusion to his fetters. "She is

not a woman for Emma to know—your mother was right about that—she and her goings-on are a scandal to the neighbourhood, but for old friendship's sake, I would have left my card on the man himself, had your disgraceful conduct left me a choice in the matter.”

For a minute or more young Rawdon makes no reply.

“You have used words I never thought to hear from you, father,” he cries at last, in a queer constrained sort of voice. “But I suppose it is just as well we should understand each other thoroughly. I have kept away from home, hitherto——”

“You have! Think what the bitterness of that, alone, has been to your mother and to me! My son lurking about the neighbourhood (you were here on Saturday night—don't think your actions are not remarked) and ashamed to come to his own father's house!”

“For the present—until your feelings towards me become juster—I will keep away still. If . . . if Emma marries Major Hervey, I suppose you and my mother will consider my ‘disgrace’ condoned?”

“When you give up your present connections, you mean—talk common-sense—when you give up connections that are taking you to the devil, yes, to the devil, sir! I have no doubt we shall have plenty of your company again. When temptation's over and their prospects in life ruined, most young men turn filial and virtuous. We have all read the parable of the Prodigal Son!”

And, with this ends the conversation. The tinkling of a bell announces that the horses are about to be saddled for the cup race, and, arm linked in arm still, Mr. Crosbie and his son walk once more along the course, and before the eyes of the Chalkshire world.

“But if you want to know how things really stand between them, look at the expression of poor old Crosbie’s face!” The charitable dispositions of Chalkshire find scope for action in the thought.

CHAPTER XV.

All the Fault of the Champagne.

YES, Jane has taken champagne enough to be, I had almost written to feel, in spirits; three or four glasses, perhaps, not as much as Mrs. Coventry Brown would take at a ball or dinner party, but sufficient, in the open air and in Jane's high-strung mood of mind and body, to affect her potently.

But her pain, though deadened, is with her throughout the day. She attends, or has the air of attending, with interest to the races: under good advice "hedges," so that if scarlet-and-blue is second for the cup she gets a dozen pairs of gloves from Dolly Standish, and if scarlet-and-blue wins, three dozen pairs from the Duke of Malta, while if scarlet-and-blue is nowhere she wins gloves, more than she can count, from everybody. Her smiles are given to all the different competitors who surround her as lavishly as her bets are made. Never in her life has Jane Theobald looked fairer, never has her beauty received more open homage from men; never have outside feminine critics been more justified, probably, in pronouncing her vain, fast, unvisitable.

And still through it all, through the flattery and excitement, through the noise and glare and intoxication of it all, her pain is with her still! She knows by

keenest instinct, although her eyes cannot follow his movements, that Theobald remains constantly by Lady Rose, and her heart grows deader and deader. Almost, I think, might the Chalkshire world hold her sins expiated could they but fathom what this vain, fast, unvisitable woman suffers.

Theobald remains constantly by Lady Rose, not so much from any irresistible predilection for Lady Rose's society, as from the fact that it is less disagreeable to him to sit still in a luxurious carriage than to walk about under the broiling sun, and in the dirt, heat and discomfort of a racecourse. Horse-racing, perhaps I ought to say Chalkshire horse-racing, is a form of gambling Francis Theobald little affects; and—could Jane but know and understand!—he really finds it a sufficiently difficult matter to get through all this glare and din and dust with even a decent outward show of interest. Lady Rose, who, more years ago than she cares to remember, learned every turn of his face, every tone of his voice, by heart, knows that he is bored, better perhaps than he knows it himself; and a good hour and a half before the race programme is over, declares herself worn out by the heat and fatigue of the day, and ready to go.

“Our train starts at five thirty, does it not?” she remarks, carelessly, and addressing Colonel Desmond, who is standing on the other side of the carriage, looking over a lilliputian betting book with Miss Childers. “You know you have promised to be Bradshaw for the occasion. Five thirty. Well, if we start

for The Folly now, we shall not have too much time for getting clean and having tea before we begin our journey. What do you say?" And she turns to Jane's husband. "Have you had dust and shouting and heat enough for one day, Mr. Theobald?"

About a fortnight ago, it may be remembered, on a starlight night, when a certain diamond ring sparkled on The Folly terrace, Lady Rose won a half jesting promise from Theobald that he would join the yachting party of Lord Barty Beaudesert at Cowes. Without any formal renewal of the subject since, it has grown to be a tacitly understood thing between them that the jest has become earnest. But the details of the plan have remained—have been purposely allowed by Lady Rose to remain—in obscurity.

"Mr. Theobald doesn't understand what you are talking about, Rose," remarks Loo Childers, who among other duties of friendship, perfectly understands that of supplying the cue, or "leading up," to a desired subject upon occasion. "It was only this morning, you know, that you and the Duke settled it all."

"Of course—after getting Barty's telegram. What a vile memory mine is!" cries Lady Rose. "One of the many symptoms I'm afraid of approaching age. Yes, you are going to be carried forcibly away to the Isle of Wight to-night," and she looks again at Theobald. "A case of 'Novel and determined abduction,' for the newspapers."

And then Lady Rose enters into explanations. After Mr. Theobald had left The Folly this morning a

telegram arrived from Barty to say that some great amateur boat-race was to take place to-morrow off Cowes—any number of thousand pounds a side, all London coming down, great excitement of the season—and an immediate adjournment from Chalkshire to the Isle of Wight had been voted by everybody.

“You, as one of the household, included Mr. Theobald,” cries Loo Childers. “I made myself your proxy, and gave a plumper for you on the spot. Now it’s no use for you to struggle,” adds Loo, looking at him bewitchingly, and Loo can look very bewitchingly at any man when she likes. “We are all going off together this evening. Colonel Desmond, the Duke, Rose and I and you. And don’t we mean to enjoy ourselves!”

Theobald answers, with Spartan promptness and decision, that it is impossible. He would be delighted, as far as inclination goes, but—it is impossible. He is going with his wife to the Liddington race-ball to-night.

“Why I thought your taste for balls met with a sudden death seven years ago?” remarks Lady Rose. “I thought you avoided all those sort of festivities on principle.”

“Jenny does not avoid them,” is Mr. Theobald’s quiet answer, given in the tone of a man whose mind is not to be shaken.

“Ah, then I am dumb.” A just perceptible change of colour comes over Lady Rose’s face. “The duties of a chaperon before everything! I must confess, for

my own part, the prospect of not going to the Lidlington ball is about the pleasantest part of our pleasant little programme. I shall think of you towards midnight, Mr. Theobald. Whatever else we are doing, we are pretty sure to be cool, and out of doors. And I shall think of you, *enjoying* yourself amongst all the crowded fashion and beauty of the Lidlington town-hall!"

But she urges the point no more. Lady Rose understands the principles of social strategy too well to urge anything upon an indolent man like Francis Theobald. Why, sooner than be put to the trouble of resisting, he would, likelier than not, take flight at once, and find shelter at his wife's side during the remainder of the day.

Lady Rose urges nothing; only, when the horses are in her carriage, proposes that Mr. Theobald shall drive with herself and Miss Childers as far as Beaudesert. Colonel Desmond, who has bets on the next race, has arranged to return somewhat later on the dog-cart, with the Duke. Will Mr. Theobald take pity on her and Loo, in their forsaken condition, and be their escort home?

"You are half my guest still," she pleads; one of Lady Rose's greatest gifts is her pleading power; "so I think I have the least little right to throw myself on your compassion!"

Well, Francis Theobald, though rigid as I have shown when principle is at stake, is not absolutely unassailable on all points. And in judging of his weak-

ness at this particular moment—a critical moment, did he but know it, in his history—we should bear in mind that he is really bored to extinction, in his mild way, by the Chalkshire races; tempted to say “yes” to any proposal that shall involve instant quiet, cleanliness, and cooler air.

“The dog-cart can take you back to Theobalds as soon as Arthur and Colonel Desmond return,” says Lady Rose, watching his face. “But of course you must go first and see if Mrs. Theobald can spare you. Loo and I will wait, in anxious expectation, till you return.”

And accordingly, some two hours having elapsed since he left it, Theobald again makes his way to the hack sociable, and after a little patient waiting, *queue* fashion, among the crowd of young men who surround Jane and her sister, secures his place once more by his wife’s side.

“Well, Jenny, my dear, how are you getting on? Won plenty of gloves, Min, I hope?” (this in friendly greeting, to his sister-in-law.) “I just came round to see when you will be thinking of going, Jane.”

“Whenever you like to have the horses put to we shall be ready,” Jane answers, with cold politeness.

“Oh, don’t think of me. As long as you and Min are amused, stay. I—the fact is”—Mr. Theobald lowers his voice so that only his wife can hear it—“the fact is I forgot to bring my portmanteau away this morning, Jane, and as Lady Rose has offered to drive me back to The Folly now, I think I may as well

be off. I shall come over on the dog-cart to Theobalds afterwards, but if you don't like me to leave you——”

“Like!” interrupts Jane. Very low, very well contained, is her voice, but a look of hatred—yes, of hatred—flashes upon him from her blue eyes. “And how do you suppose it can possibly matter to me whether you leave us here or not? Do you think we could not find plenty of people to take care of us, and see us home, too, if we wanted them?”

“I am quite sure you could,” says Theobald, and he gives a glance at Min, who is at this moment holding a lively discussion with Dolly Standish and other youngsters of the regiment on some point, presumedly connected with horse-racing; a discussion in which everybody seems to speak at once, and of which the predominant tone can only be accurately described by the word “loud.”

Dolly Standish and his friends have evidently taken as much champagne as their modest allowance of brains can stand; poor Min is decidedly more rosy in the face, more noisy in her accents, than is compatible with the strictest refinement.

“I am quite sure you and your sister could, under any circumstances, find plenty of people to take care of you,” repeats Mr. Theobald.

The tone of his voice, rather than the words themselves, the tone and a certain expression in the glance he gives Miss Arundel, cause all Jane's hardly pent-up passion to overflow.

"Lucky for us that we can!" she retorts bitterly. "I don't know how it may be for ladies, of course. Outsiders, like Min and me, do well to accept whatever attention comes to us."

A hot flush mounts over Francis Theobald's face. Since the renewal of his acquaintance with Lady Rose Golightly, the remembrance of Jane's lowly antecedents and connections has galled him, more times than one. And the sight of her at this moment, at poor, happy, unconscious Min's side, the audacity with which she utters that unpleasant word "outsiders," ably second the work that the influence of old refined associations has begun.

"You are a fool, Jane, and by God you'll live to repent your folly! If you have no self-respect, have the goodness to remember, please, that you owe something to me."

This is in whispers. From the proximity of the two heads the world might really be justified in thinking that Theobald was committing that worst solecism in manners, a flirtation with his own wife!

"What I owe to you? Oh, I like that." Jane laughs; not a pleasant laugh to hear. "Surely you don't want a scene of powerful Domestic Interest before such an audience as this, do you?"

"I wish, once and for all, that you would drop your theatrical expressions," is Mr. Theobald's answer. "Do remember, if you can, Jane, that you have done with the sawdust and the footlights now."

"And suppose I have not done with them? . . .

but why waste time with any more of this senseless talk? If you are not interested in the races, I am. Captain Brabazon," turning pointedly away from her husband, "will you lend me your card? Some one has stolen mine, and I can't remember whether I have taken odds or evens with Rawdon Crosbie for the Garrison Cup. Can you help me?"

Captain Brabazon leans across with his card and explains: two of the "odds" having been scratched, and another gone lame, Mrs. Theobald, by every canon of fair and equitable betting, must have taken "evens." Rawdon Crosbie's good sense will show him this, without any reference to cards or betting-books.

"Oh! And that is called honour!" cries Jane. "I learn some new meaning of words every day, now."

After this, whatever Mr. Theobald has to say must be said, whether he likes it or not, before an audience.

"Well, then, Jane," he remarks after a minute, "if you really think you can return without me I may as well start. I see Lady Rose's horses won't stand."

"Poor dear things!" says Jane, mockingly. "Don't keep them a minute longer than you can help."

"I shall be back in good time to dress. By-the-by, at what o'clock do we start for the ball?"

"I've ordered the usual shandrydan at half-past nine," is Jane's answer. "But why come back at all? Why not go direct from The Folly? It will take you out of your way, I'm afraid, to come all the way round by Theobalds."

"I had not thought of that. You are sure you would as soon go alone?"

"Oh, quite sure. Do whatever suits yourself best. I shan't expect you till I see you."

A suppressed smile passed over the faces of more than one of the listeners to the connubial colloquy.

"You are a very fashionable couple, upon my word!" cries Minnie Arundel. "When I get a husband, I know I shall take care how I allow him so much liberty."

And Theobald returns to Lady Rose. Never did her languid, high-bred smile, her thousand refinements of voice and manner strike him with so marked a contrast, as at this moment!

"You have got your leave, then?" she asks in a whisper, when Mr. Theobald has again taken his place in her carriage.

"Yes, I have got my leave," he answers. "Leave of a very elastic nature, if I like to avail myself of it."

In doubling, to get clear of the crowd, Lady Rose's coachman brings his horses close alongside of the Theobalds' sociable. Just then, an old apple-woman gets in the way and is all but run over by the high-stepping greys; a crowd gathers round—with the ever-ready indignation of a British crowd against the bloated aristocracy they worship—the barouche must come to a stand-still. For the space of one minute Lady Rose Golightly and Jane Theobald are separated by, at most, half-a-dozen feet.

"Who, in the world, are those flash-looking people

Theobald has picked up?" asks Min, of the Duke of Malta.

"Those flash-looking people are my only sister and her most particular friend," answers his Grace, with a grin; thinking what a good story he will make afterwards of the actress's mistake.

Jane bursts out laughing. "You have put your foot into it nicely now, Min," she cries; then turns, and looks with cool, deliberate steadiness into Lady Rose Golightly's face.

Lady Rose's patrician head bows graciously. (Forgiving creature that she is! Think of bowing at all, after that atrocious note of Mrs. Theobald's.) Jane's slight figure remains upright as a dart. Never was the cut direct given with more uncompromising point and directness. Mr. Theobald, who happens to have his eye-glass in use at the moment, evidently discerns what is going on; for he bends forward and says a word or two, very low in tone, very tender of manner, to his "hostess." Then the crowd separates—for a second the eyes of the two women meet: a look of intolerable triumph is in Lady Rose's; and the barouche sweeps on.

Not again, in this world, shall the two unequally matched rivals cross each other's path.

More dust and heat, and yelling of the crowd; more bets, more flirtation, more champagne. Oh, throbbing feverish torture of it all! will it never end? It ends at last. Miss Minnie Arundel, with whom, whatever pleasure she may be tasting, business is still

paramount, looks suddenly at her watch, and finds to her dismay, that she must start at once if she mean to catch her train for London, and be in time for the first piece to-night.

“Oh, bother the first piece!” says the Duke of Malta, gracefully. By the time the day has advanced thus far, the Duke of Malta never for a moment leaves Jane’s carriage. “Nobody ever thinks of being in time for first pieces. Stay over the race ball, of course—Mrs. Theobald will bring you—and I’ll give you lots of dances.” So whatever the rest of the Beaudesert party may intend, his Grace, it seems, has not formed any definite resolution about going to Cowes to-night. “Manager make a row? Oh, bother the manager!” This is the style of his Grace’s vinous talk. “I’ll square it all off with him.”

“Will you, indeed?” says Min, with a saucy glance at the Duke of Malta’s red half-tipsy face. “I don’t think, as matters stand just at present, I should advise you to try the experiment. Rawdon, my dear boy,” to Rawdon Crosbie, who is keeping jealous guard over the side of the carriage farthest from the duke; “if you can find our coachman, and if, by any accident, our coachman can stand, have the horses put to, and then see us through the crowd—there’s a good child. I haven’t a minute to lose.”

Rawdon Crosbie finds out the coachman, fortunately still able to stand, then mounts the box, and escorts the sisters until they are clear of the race-course. He would escort them to the railway station, and take Mrs.

Theobald home, if he were allowed to do so. But Jane says no, and says it peremptorily.

"I have had ferocious looks enough from papa, as it is," she tells him, in her usual gay, half-bantering tone; "and shall probably get plenty more from the rest of the family before the day is out. I don't want to add to my crimes by being seen 'philandering' with you all over the country."

"Have you the slightest intention of giving me one dance to-night, Mrs. Theobald? I hardly like to ask, after the number I heard you promise to the Duke of Malta."

"Don't you, really? It seems you have grown very modest all at once. Yes; I can promise you just one solitary waltz, Mr. Crosbie—number five, if you like. Always supposing," adds Jane, cheerfully, "that I am admitted to the ball-room when the time comes! I have got my ticket, certainly—as Colonel Mauleverer is a steward, there was no difficulty about that—but how can I tell a regiment of old ladies, with Mesdames Coventry Brown and Pippin for generals, will not be ready to bar my entrance?"

But the moment the carriage drives on, the moment she is alone with her sister, all Jane's forced spirits fall to the ground. She sinks back in the carriage, lets the muscles of her face do what they will with themselves; she looks thirty years old. Despite the too visible wear and tear of the hardest profession in the world, you would think, seeing the sisters for the

first time together at this moment, that Miss Minnie Arundel was the younger and happier of the two.

The train is already in sight when they reach the station; the platform is crowded. Only one more minute's hurried talk can they have together before Miss Arundel's departure.

"Min," cries Jane, with a sort of burst, and putting her feverish hand within her sister's arm, "you have seen a little, at last, of my life—my 'lady's life' we used to talk so grand about. Jolly one, isn't it?"

"It would be a jolly one to me, I know," answers Min promptly. "I should say you've just got every single thing a woman could wish for."

"My heart's breaking, Min. On God's earth there doesn't walk a more miserable woman than me."

Something in the tone of her voice makes Min look seriously into Jane's flushed, faded face.

"It's all the fault of the champagne, Jenny. I've felt the same sort of thing scores of times. Champagne *doesn't* do by daylight. Take a soda as soon as you get home, with the tiniest little drop of brandy in it, and then lie down. You'll be right enough long before it's time to dress."

"Sometimes I think I'll cut it, Min—cut my 'lady's life'—and get my bread by the work I was brought up to do. Am I too old to go back to the stage, do you think? Looks are the thing, you know, for the ballet-going public, not art. And I haven't lost *them*. With a blonde wig and plenty of paint I might look tolerable in a break-down still?"

"You'd take the shine out of most of us, if you went back to the stage to-morrow, Jenny," cries warm-hearted little Min; "but you would be a fool ever to think of such a thing. With a husband to keep you, and means to bring up the child independent, how can you even talk of toiling and slaving at the old life again for bread?"

"Bread is not everything," says Jane.

"Perhaps not," is Min's answer. "But bread, and meat, and a good glass of wine afterwards, and a house to live in, and a child, and a husband, and as many silk dresses as one chooses to buy, are pretty nearly everything, I should say."

"As many silk dresses as one chooses to buy!" Are the women better or worse off in the main who can think, with poor ignorant Minnie Arundel, that this is the very crown and climax of all human prosperity?

CHAPTER XVI.

Society in Full Dress.

No army of old ladies receives Jane, when four or five hours later, she drives up to the brilliantly-lighted portico of the Lidlington assembly-rooms; only the pompous head-waiter of the town, in his way as "exclusive" a personage as Mrs. Coventry Brown is in hers, and almost as learned as that great oracle herself in the awful mysteries of social status and precedents.

"Carriages ordered at two," enunciates the Lidlington Jeames, in a voice suited to hired coachmen, to the driver of Jane's shandrydan. "Ladies' cloak room to the left, madam, two steps down." This in a tone finely discriminative of the precise amount of condescension required by the occasion, to Jane. In another minute "Mrs. Theobald's" name is shouted forth by waiter No. 2 at the door of the ball-room, and Jane finds herself in the august presence of Chalkshire society in full dress—society, bare-shouldered, short-sleeved, plumed—the feminine predominating over the masculine element in the proportion of about three to one.

It is late (till the very last moment Jane waited in her ball-dress and flowers at the hall-door of Theobalds, hoping against hope that Theobald, at the eleventh

hour, would relent and call for her). The second dance had been danced. Every available cavalier is walking about the ball-room, his partner on his arm. A few old gentlemen stand around the doorway, patiently gazing at nothing over each other's bald heads. Knots of ladies, old, young, and middle-aged, white, black, and coloured, are everywhere. Jane is alone.

She can never outwardly be awkward; thanks partly to the liberal gifts of nature, partly to her early professional training in that hardest of all arts to be learnt—the art of standing gracefully at ease. As self-possessed as though she were simply inspecting the house in some interval of the ballet, Jane stands, her fair arms folded in the airiest of attitudes, a composed smile on her lips, and looks about her—her heart beating till it seems to her her tulle and laces can scarce conceal its beats—upon Chalkshire society taking its pleasure. Theobald is not here yet, nor any of the party from Beaudesert, neither is Rawdon Crosbie; so much she sees at a glance. But Mrs. Crosbie and Emma, Adonis Hervey, the Pippins, Mrs. Coventry Brown, all the enemy, in force, are present, and she must stand alone, the cruel cordon of moral quarantine stretched around her, and face them.

Right fearlessly does she do it. Colonel Mauleverer, with Lady Laurie, the wife of the member, upon his arm, passes her close; and Jane looks exactly one inch above his head. She will recognise no man to-night—promptly she decides on this—she will recognise no

man so long as he has a lady on his arm! Captain Brabazon goes by with a Miss Coventry Brown; she sees him not. Presently approach Mrs. Crosbie and Adonis. Mrs. Crosbie's eyes, a little too consciously, seek the farther pole; Adonis, from under his heavy lids, gives Jane one of his usual satyr-like glances of admiration. She is calmly, superbly unaware of their existence! Alone, unsupported, not a muscle of her face betraying that she feels her isolation, she stands thus for three or four minutes—stands till the premonitory notes of the next dance set young men at liberty to follow their own inclinations, and places young ladies under the sheltering wing of chaperons.

Men are braver—oh, constitutionally, braver far than women; but then theirs is courage oftenest, of a grand, and thrilling, and heroic pattern; courage that the world hears of. Under the small lessons read to them by their sisters, I think women are called upon to show endurance dumbly that men know nothing of. What man, undeserving of obloquy, ever went through a five minutes', or a five seconds' ordeal like unto this?

Aspirant partners throng round Jane eagerly. If a common ball-room triumph were all the success she coveted, she might have it, cheaply enough. But Jane—the worse for her—dreams of another sort of victory. Once again . . . must I write it?—for the *last* time, as she drove hither through the silent lonely lanes, Jane's better angel pleaded to her on Francis Theobald's behalf: "Are husbands of the same flesh and

blood as wives?" said the friendly monitor. "If a man err, is it not his masculine, godlike right, that he should be sued to rather than forgiven? Can any wrong-doing, any infidelity of his place him, as it would you, beyond the reach of pardon? By your own obstinacy, your own jealous madness, are you not giving over the game into Lady Rose's hands? Think twice of it, Jane. Think twice before you throw up the sponge to fate. To-night will be the turning-point. To-night you win or lose all," (oh, too prophetic monitor!) "Right is on your side, aye, and might, too, the might of youth, and beauty, and great love. Other champion than yourself have you none. Put away jealousy, pride; *resolve* to win your husband back; resolve to hold him when you have won him, and you must succeed."

Aspirant partners, I say, throng round her eagerly. She might fill her card half-a-dozen times over if she chose. But Jane does not choose. To-night, she thinks, is one of many possibilities. She will leave as many blanks as she writes down engagements in her programme.

"And only one square dance for me," says Dolly Standish, looking as if he could cry. The magic of Jane's blue eyes has robbed the little ensign of whatever wits he may before have possessed. "Only these miserable Lancers for me?"

"If you behave very well, I will give you a waltz by-and-by," says Jane. "As to these miserable Lan-

cers, if you prefer looking on, instead of dancing them, I shall be contented."

But Dolly Standish will not relinquish his chance of dancing, though it be only a square dance, with the prettiest woman in the room, and at once offers Mrs. Theobald his arm.

Few of the sets are as yet made up; and before Jane and her partner have walked a dozen steps, they are beset by Dolly's brother officers with inquiries as to *vis-à-vis* and side-couples. "That's all right," says Dolly, when the required number is filled in. "All nice people, I think, Mrs. Theobald. Bore having any but nice people in one's set, isn't it?"

And away he walks, in the ignorance and happiness of his heart to the upper end of the room; there to wait, at Mrs. Theobald's side, for the nice people who are to be their fellow dancers.

But in social arrangements, such as the disposition of Lancers—man, as Dolly Standish has yet to learn—holds but a subordinate and insignificant part in the order of creation. Their *vis-à-vis*, Colonel Mauleverer, keeps his engagement faithfully; Captain Brabazon, and some other officer of the regiment, keep theirs. But the set does not "form." One of the ladies, on seeing Jane, remembers that she had already promised to be *vis-à-vis* to her cousin. A second would prefer, as the night is warm, getting nearer the door. Bit by bit, the set collapses, melts away into thin air; and Jane and Dolly Standish are left alone.

They try another, of which Emma and Adonis

Hervey form part, and where a couple is palpably wanted; and with the same result.

Dolly Standish's mouth, always a little open, opens wider and wider. "I never saw such a —— extraordinary thing in my life!" says he; driven by the sincerity of his feelings into strong language.

"Never mind. You shall have a whole waltz to make up for it," says Jane, lightly. "Fortunately, one doesn't want a *vis-à-vis* for round dances, or you and I wouldn't have much chance, should we, Dolly?"

"I never saw such a —— extraordinary thing in my life," is all Dolly Standish can utter.

They sit out the Lancers, perforce. Jane dances the next dance, a galop, with the Colonel, and just as it is finished, Rawdon Crosbie makes his appearance.

He walks bravely up, before his mother, Emma—the assembled world of Chalkshire—to Jane.

"Number five is mine, Mrs. Theobald; I have come exactly in time for it, I think."

Well, reader, Jane's pride is smarting sore; how could it do otherwise, after the misadventure of the Lancers? Here, in this Lidlington ball-room she is in the thick of her foes—in the heat of the battle. Mrs. Crosbie, Emma, Major Hervey confront her, at this very moment, face to face, and yet—yet she can show generosity! Shall we put it otherwise—descend off moral stilts, as she would say herself? At every instant she looks for Theobald's coming, with hope that is fast becoming passionate, looks forward to the victory

she means to win to-night over Lady Rose, and uneasy conscience, inherent selfish instinct of "doing as we would be done by;"—call it by a grand name or a paltry one—bids her act with magnanimity even to Emma Marsland.

"Number five is yours, or any other number you like. See," showing him her card; "I have left plenty of blanks in my programme. But, Rawdon, my dear boy," this in a whisper, "I don't think you have any business to dance with me yet. I've been thinking over a good many things since I saw you this afternoon, and I am not going to call myself your friend, and help you to make a fool of yourself any longer. You must go and ask Miss Marsland for number five."

And she is obdurate, accepts Captain Brabazon, who comes up just at this moment to engage her for the waltz. Rawdon Crosbie has no choice but to obey.

Emma, with a rather empty card, is sitting beside Mrs. Crosbie, the venerable Adonis fluttering in attendance, at the farther end of the ballroom. The poor little girl's heart begins to thump violently as she sees her lover—can any quarrel, any estrangement, prevent Emma from regarding Rawdon as her lover?—approach.

"Oh, mamma, here is Rawdon, after all! How nice he looks! I never think anyone looks like Rawdon in a ballroom. Oh I wonder if he will ask me? Mamma, I *must* dance with him if he does."

“Certainly, my dear Emma,” answers Mrs. Crosbie in her most composed tone. “If your card is not full, give Rawdon a dance, certainly. Why not?”

Mrs. Crosbie is one of those delightfully narrow-minded women, the clog-wheels, the grand conservative force of the world, who never swerve aside from a principle or a theory once laid down. Shifty, broad-minded people, to whom the whole motley scene of our existence is one ever changing, ever perplexing problem, may, now and then, enlarge their definitions as occasion demands. If Mrs. Crosbie finds that her theories do not at any time cover the facts of life, she adopts the simpler plan of discarding such facts as do not fit in with Mrs. Crosbie’s theories.

“Young women whose sisters are small actresses, and whose uncles play trombones in orchestras, are persons whom society does not visit.”

Mrs. Crosbie enunciated this doctrine from the first, has acted up to it since—with the slightest disposition to waver, when one was uncertain as to Lady Rose’s line of conduct—holds to it now. She is by no means a woman devoid of maternal affection. To see Rawdon well married is the dearest wish of Mrs. Crosbie’s heart, and many a tear, that not even Mr. Crosbie knows of, has she shed over the rupture of Rawdon’s engagement. But not one sting of self-reproach has heightened her pain. A woman of colder feeling, it may be, but of larger comprehension, must inevitably have speculated sometimes as to whether she, herself, were not to blame. If, after the Czar-

toriska adventure in Spa, she had behaved towards the victim of the error with simplest charity, simplest decent justice, would Rawdon's sympathy ever have been enlisted upon the side of evil? Nay, would evil have existed at all had her own pious imagination not sedulously coined it? But questions of this kind are to Mrs. Crosbie unknown. Had Lady Rose Golightly really and seriously taken up Mrs. Theobald's acquaintance, a reconstruction of one's moral code might have been forced upon one. . . . But that is past. And everyone in the neighbourhood says that Mrs. Crosbie's conduct has been beautiful, taking poor Emma's part so entirely, although we know what a *mother's heart* must prompt! And if Rawdon is to lose the one great matrimonial chance of his life, is it not better our dear Alfred should profit by the misfortune than another? And whatever chastening Providence may see fit to assign us, if we know that we have met it in a right spirit, know that we have acted as is usual for persons in a refined class of life to act, can we not at least bear our sufferings with conscience undisturbed?

"Certainly, give Rawdon a dance, my dear Emmy. A family dissension should never be allowed to show itself before the world. You agree with me, Alfred?" touching Major Hervey's arm with her fan. "It is wiser and better on every account that Emma should be seen to dance with Rawdon as usual?"

Adonis, raising his eye-lids by about a hairbreadth, gives an "um" and an "aw," and a glance of tender

reproach, that he feels must be irresistible, at the heiress. But Emma's heart is in her mouth. She hears, sees Rawdon only; and the glance is lost upon her.

"You are late, Rawdon. We half thought you might have returned to town. Your father told us he did not observe you when he left the course."

Mrs. Crosbie's tone is in nowise different to what it would be if they had parted amicably at luncheon; she extends her hand courteously to her son. Poor Mrs. Crosbie! She loves the lad, I repeat, with such faculty of loving as Heaven has bestowed upon her, and the moment, doubt it not, is bitter to her. But nature has compensations for us all. Is not Chalkshire society looking on? Must not Chalkshire society be saying how admirably collected, how Christian, how well-bred is Mrs. Crosbie's demeanour? Considerations like these lend a sweetness and a dignity to every hard but well-performed duty of human life.

"Well, yes, I am rather late," says Rawdon, whose face is burning under his sense of guilt or of shyness, or both. "The flyman's fault . . . had to take the Pippins first . . . obliged to drive slow because Mrs. Pippin was afraid of the corners. I—I hope, Emmy"—standing upright as a ramrod while he prefers the request—"that you have a dance you can spare me?"

Hardly knowing what she does, and without answering a word, Emma jumps up. Another minute, and Rawdon's arm is round her waist, and they are

whirling away amidst the crowd of waltzers, while Major Hervey is left to pull down his whiskers, elevate his eyebrows, and otherwise maintain his small dignity as best he can, at Mrs. Crosbie's side.

Rawdon waltzes on and on, as though he never would leave off. He knows that leaving off means conversation; and in their present agitating position, conversation with Emma Marsland is not a thing to be encountered lightly. Emma, however, at the best of times not a Taglioni, is ere long physically unable to endure this strain upon her powers. "I can't go a step further, Rawdon! I'm as giddy . . . oh, *do* stop."

And when they stop she is forced, if she would keep herself from falling, to cling to his arm with a vigour that puts sentimental embarrassments out of the question. Oh, in spite of giddiness, how blissful this waltz with Rawdon is! What a different feeling one has, somehow, towards a lover of two-and-twenty and a lover of fifty-three! Oh, if Mrs. Theobald would but die, or leave the country, or anything, how nice it would be to forgive Rawdon, and wear one's wedding-dress for the right bridegroom after all!

"There are a good many people here to-night," says Rawdon, looking straight before him, not into his partner's face, as he makes this brilliant remark.

"Yes, a good many. Seventeen more than last year, Mrs. Pippin says."

"I half thought I might have seen you at the races to-day, Emma?"

"I should like to have gone. Mrs. Coventry Brown offered to take me, but mamma and Major Hervey said I should find the sun too hot, and I didn't want to get my face blistered for this evening."

"It's—it's very pleasant for you and me to be dancing together again, Emmy?"

No answer.

"Emmy, forgive me for what I am going to say. I have no right to interfere, but I can't help it. Don't make another mistake, my dear. I am sufficiently your brother, am I not, to entitle me to say that? Don't make another mistake."

"Mistake!" falters Emma, her fingers closing tighter on Rawdon's arm. "Do you mean——"

"I mean," answers Rawdon—he whispers, but every word falls clear and distinct on Emma's heart—"I mean, after very rightly discarding a young fool who was not worthy of you, Emma, don't take an old one, who may be less worthy still. That is all. Now, let us have another turn. You are not angry with me for what I have said?"

Angry! Why, what she longs for is that he would say more, that he would take back his forfeited right to guide, control, every action of her life! Emma has, however, been too thoroughly trained in all little conventional feminine falsities to give outward sign of relenting. Rawdon has sinned. It is Rawdon's place, Rawdon's duty, to plead for pardon. But oh! how freely the pardon would be granted should he plead for it!

And the waltz goes on, and he pleads for nothing, not even for another dance. The waltz ends, and they walk about the room together, chatting and laughing almost as in old days. (So much so, indeed, that the world infers Rawdon Crosbie is coming to his senses; was it likely Mrs. Crosbie's son would throw away thirty thousand pounds in earnest?) Then Rawdon takes Emma back to her place and to Major Hervey; stands dutifully attentive to his mother for about the space of two minutes; finally bows himself away with as good a grace as he can command, and—goes at once in search of Mrs. Theobald.

He finds her in the refreshment-room with Captain Brabazon—a little circle of attendant red-coats fluttering around.

“I have kept the next dance for you, Mr. Crosbie,” cries Jane, when Rawdon draws near. “Don’t break my heart by telling me you are engaged for it?”

“I am engaged for nothing,” says Rawdon, displaying his empty card. “Number five was promised me by some one, and I was thrown over. It’s my fate to be thrown over, Mrs. Theobald.”

“Poor, interesting, blighted being! Well, you shan’t be thrown over any more—at least, not for number six. And it’s a quadrille, too—a dance involving *vis-à-vis*. That makes it all the more flattering that I remembered to keep it for you.”

But Jane has not the slightest intention, really, of dancing number six with anybody. When Captain Brabazon has gone away to dance his duty-dance of

the evening with Lady Laurie, she tells Rawdon the story of the lancers; quietly, but with a certain tremble about the lips that he has learnt to interpret; and adds, that she has no wish just now to brave any more square dances. Under different circumstances, towards the end of the evening, perhaps, with some very distinguished and imposing partner, she may be tempted to try her fate again. At present she prefers returning to the ball-room—if Rawdon will be so good as to take her there—and looking on. This is the first time, he must recollect, that she has ever been in a full-dress assemblage of English ladies and gentlemen. Uneducated savage that she is, has she not got everything to see and learn?

Well, they return to the ball-room, and Jane's "looking on" speedily resolves itself into eager watchfulness of the doorway. Every time there is the stir of a new arrival her tell-tale face shows its impatience. She answers "Yes" and "No," haphazard, to half young Rawdon says.

"If I could muster sufficient courage to be impertinent, I should ask who it is?" he remarks at last. "He who runs may read that Mrs. Theobald is expecting some one."

"I should think Mrs. Theobald *was* expecting some one," answers Jane, readily. "You don't suppose I would come to a provincial ball to dance with commoners all night? I am expecting his Grace the Duke of Malta every minute."

"The Duke of Malta!" cries Rawdon, not without

a spice of malice. "Why, they all left for the Isle of Wight ages ago. You may look incredulous, Mrs. Theobald, but it's a fact—the last important and authentic Chalkshire news. Some one told me of it just as I was coming away from the hotel. Lady Rose and her whole party left Beaudesert for the Isle of Wight this evening."

The colour dies on Jane's cheek. "I don't understand you—I don't understand what you mean by 'her whole party,'" she is beginning; but even while the words are on her lips a re-assuring sight cuts her short,—the sight of the Duke of Malta's rosy face, rendered doubly rosy by his white tie and waistcoat (and the fact of having dined), just within the doorway.

"So much for the last important and authentic Chalkshire news, Mr. Crosbie! Lady Rose and her party are not in the Isle of Wight, you see, after all."

"The Duke of Malta is not," says Rawdon a little coolly. "We will wait to see about the rest."

"The rest are not far behind, depend upon it." And in her jealous imagination Jane already pictures the entrance of Lady Rose, smiling, odiously triumphant, on Mr. Theobald's arm.

But no Lady Rose, no Mr. Theobald, appears. His Grace, seeing Mrs. Theobald, advances at once, regardless of assiduous waiters, of bowing stewards, to meet her; and before he utters a word Jane's heart knows the truth.

The Duke of Malta is alone.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Your sweet little Yes."

It is a rare occurrence for any of the Beaudesert family to patronize the race-ball, and a thrill of pleasure runs through every feminine breast, old and young, at his Grace's unexpected appearance. Mammás glance at their daughters; daughters glance at the state of their gloves and flounces, while each rapidly sums up her own personal chance of securing the Duke for a partner. The Duke takes not the slightest notice of any human creature in the room, save and except her for whose sake he came here—Jane.

"You have left plenty of blanks for me on your card, I hope, Mrs. Theobald?" The Duke of Malta's utterance is—well, is not clearer than when we saw him last: has he not dined meanwhile? "Never forgive you if you haven't kept me lots of dances. Got all sorts of penitential messages for you—a note somewhere—oh no, I bade them send the note round to Theobalds. He's off, you know?"

"Off!" repeats Jane. "What are you talking about? Who's off?"

"Why, Theobald, of course. Don't faint. Rose carried him away whether he liked it or not. Plucky little woman, my sister Rose, when she sets her mind on a thing. And there was Loo and Desmond—they

wanted me to go, too, or they were civil enough to say so; but I wouldn't have spoilt the pleasant little party for the world. Besides," adds the Duke, with as much tender expression as his very husky voice can compass, "I prefer being here, Mrs. Theobald."

"You show your taste," says Jane, in a curious, cool sort of manner, with curiously untrembling lips.

"They have gone down to Barty—my brother Barty, you know. I suppose Mr. Theobald told you?"

"Mr. Theobald told me nothing."

"Barty is at Cowes with his yacht, and they have gone to join him there—for the present," adds his Grace, in a tone of after-dinner playfulness. "I expect to hear they are all off to the Mediterranean, or Norway, or somewhere, in a day or two. Fine thing for the Chalkshire papers, won't it be? 'Grand Sensational Elopement in High Life!—More than one Respectable Family plunged into Grief!' Depend upon it, we shall see the whole story in the 'Lidlington Looker-on' to-morrow morning. Capital joke—eh?"

"A most capital joke," says Jane.

Rawdon Crosbie has retired into the background, and she stands with the Duke of Malta, alone; stands, it is not too much to say, the observed of every pair of eyes in this Lidlington ball-room. His Grace, after a minute, takes her programme in his hand, and begins scrawling his noble name down for the following waltz, and for every other vacant dance he can find; and Jane, smiling, looks over it with him, and re-

marks, "He can have as many as he likes, and welcome."

. . . Jane smiling! Yes:—like one stricken in hot blood, who as yet shows not his hurt, the poor girl stands, with these hundred or so of people watching her face, and gives no sign, outwardly, of her death-wound. No sign, outwardly; but, in less time than it has taken me to write, direst resolve, crude and wavering in her heart till now, has come maturity.

What is a man's first, natural, "human" feeling when news equivalent to this news which Jane has got (or believes herself to have got) abruptly reaches him? The burning desire—so I am told—of vengeance. Well—women, though their passions be as water unto wine compared to those of men, *have* passions, and I suspect, in any great crisis, are apt to feel every whit as "humanly." Only, a woman's weapons are different. No pistol, no horsewhip for her; no banishment of the offender from hearth and home. But she can take, fair and young as this woman is—she can take deadlier vengeance, still. And Jane has it in her to take it. Make no mistake about her character, because hitherto you have seen her light and frolicsome, and playing at life! Jane has it in her to take the black suicidal vengeance of reprisals. Theobald has deliberately left her for Lady Rose Golightly:—such details as the Duke goes on whispering, half true, half purposely false, respecting the "Grand Sensational Elopement," leave no doubt upon her mind that the betrayal was premeditated. And Theobald's world—the world, oh monstrous in-

justice! that bows and cringes before Lady Rose Golithly—holds itself outraged by *her* appearance among its quadrilles and lancers to-night! How if she should justify that opinion, from a height, guilty though it be, that they shall envy still? How if she should pay back Theobald that which she owes him—aye, to the very image and superscription of the payment money?

"Ridiculous sight, a poor devil in a jealous fit!" remarks his Grace, presently, in one of his plethoric whispers. "Just as I was finishing dressing, they told me a young gentleman wanted to see me, Reverend Samuel Smylie. I didn't want to be bothered with any young gentlemen, or Reverend Samuel Smylies either; however, he wouldn't go away, and so, after a time, I went down to the drawing-room and spoke to him. The curate was sitting by Loo's work-table, crying—honour, Mrs. Theobald, I am sure you won't believe me, but 'tis true—crying till the tears ran down his nose, and with an open letter in his hand. Loo, it seems, had written—very pretty of her, I think—to say 'Ta, ta, for ever,' and Smylie had rushed over, like a madman, just in time to find himself too late. I made matters as pleasant as I could for him, by saying there were extenuating circumstances. Desmond and she had been friends for years. She had jilted fifty other fellows for Desmond just in the same way—things of this kind always happened for the best, if you only knew it, *et cetera*. 'I would have given my life for her, your Grace!' cried the poor fool. 'I loved that girl, my God! and believed in her, and trusted

her!’ His face was the colour of a lemon; his hand twitched so that he could scarce hold the letter as he stood, blubbering, by the table where Loo and he used to carry on their spooning. Never saw such a ridiculous sight in my life!”

“I should think not!” says Jane, laughing aloud. “And are not likely to see such a sight again. People like the Reverend Samuel Smylie should be put under a glass-case. They are too good for everyday use.”

And then their waltz begins. The Duke of Malta, despite his weight and stature, waltzes to perfection, waltzes with a *verve*—I can find no adequate Saxon word—that he can scarcely have acquired, indeed, in Belgravian drawing-rooms. The town band, inspired by the knowledge that a duke’s noble legs are moving in harmony to their strains, discourse to the utmost of their ability. And all Chalkshire is looking on! And Jane’s cheeks—yes, though her heart is broken, though she is going to perdition fast as human creature can go—Jane’s cheeks show a livelier scarlet, her young limbs move with feverish, quickened grace. Portly Chalkshire Lucretias—Lucretias safely anchored, half a century ago, in life’s dullest matrimonial moorings—raise fans to their elderly faces rather than witness so demoralizing a sight!

They dance this waltz: they sit out the next dance, a galop. Then succeed lancers.

“You never commit any of these square abominations, I should hope?” remarks his Grace. He has found an armchair for Jane in one of the most con-

spicuous parts of the ballroom; he leans over her, holding her bouquet, and looking as devotedly gallant as a very hot and rather inebriated little man of twelve-stone-six can look. “You never commit the atrocity of a square dance!”

“As a rule, never,” answers Jane. “But I don’t mind dancing this set of lancers with you. You meant to ask me for it, by-the-by, didn’t you?”

“I meant, and I mean, to ask you for every dance to-night,” is the Duke’s answer. “At all events, I don’t mean to ask any one in the room *but* you.”

“I should hope not, indeed,” says Jane, with a little toss of her head; “I never think of accepting divided attentions!”

“And we are to dance the lancers, you say?”

“Yes, we are to dance the lancers. But mind you get the best people in our set!—all the very heaviest Chalkshire swells.”

And, five minutes later, behold Jane in the top set of the room, the other three ladies consisting of an archdeacon’s daughter, Lady Laurie, and Mrs. Crosbie!

At all the public county balls it is Mrs. Crosbie’s wont to walk through one square dance, if Sir John Laurie, the member, be present to ask her. Sir John Laurie is present, and has asked her to-night; and their engagement is for this particular set of lancers. And so—irony of fate!—Jane’s hand and Mrs. Crosbie’s meet; they bow, they curtsey, they “visit” each other at last, under the Duke of Malta’s auspices!

Mrs. Crosbie puts a smiling face upon the matter. "A public ball must always be a public ball, Sir John," she remarks, when, the lancers over, she makes the circuit of the room, all dignity, amber satin, and black lace, upon the member's arm. "The position was embarrassing, certainly; but in these cases—in these cases," says Mrs. Crosbie, with delightful humility, "I never take upon myself to assume the initiative. Had dear Lady Laurie thought it advisable to withdraw from the set, I should of course have followed her example without hesitation, and have left the Duke and Mrs. Francis Theobald alone."

"Mrs. Francis Theobald is an uncommonly pretty woman," remarks old Sir John.

Quadrille and waltz; lancers, galop, and quadrille; much ear-rending music; much blood-poisoning carbonic acid; much reducing of tulle and tarlatan to rags; some few light hearts, it may be, among the crowd; some tragically heavy ones:—thus the Lidlington race-ball, Jane's last successful appearance before the Chalkshire public runs its appointed course.

Under no circumstances of life could Emma Marsland feel actually tragic, just as she could never, in her lightest moment, rise to actual farce. But about as intensely, blankly miserable as the Drawing-room Comedy of her existence will admit of, she does feel to-night. She gets a fair number of duty partners—poor Emmy—and Adonis is her devoted slave! Never for a moment, during the intervals of dancing, are

Major Hervey's soft flatteries and wiry whiskers away from the heiress's ear. And still Emma is miserable. She has been trying sedulously, during the past wretched fortnight, to like Adonis and to leave off liking Rawdon. Rawdon, so her best friends say, has behaved with an absence of right principle that makes her escape *a mercy*. Rawdon never proposed for herself, but for her money. He has paraded his shameless admiration for Mrs. Theobald, and her own humiliation, before the eyes of the whole county. And Emma, in return, loves him a little better than ever! And all that her heart trembles, yearns for, is reconciliation. And Rawdon will not come near her. Rawdon, lugubrious of face and mien, passes his evening in dancing with partners like the Browns and Pippins, or in moodily hanging about such doorways as command a view of the adjoining sitting-out room. (A room in which, as the night progresses, Mrs. Theobald and the Duke of Malta chiefly remain: his Grace talking low and earnestly, getting soberer, evidently, as he talks—Jane listening in silence: not shrinking from the whispers of her companion, as though she loathed them, or from the glances of any who pass as though they stabbed her; but with the strangest look all the time upon her flushed face—a kind of wild, *hunted* look the like of which I hope you, Reader, may never be called upon to see on any human face—knowing yourself to be one of the hunters!)

"Our young Rawdon does not seem in very high feather to-night, Emmy." It has got to be a matter

of course, during the past week, that Major Hervey shall call the heiress "Emmy." "Not in such high spirits as when we came upon him and his friends that night at Wilcocks's. You remember?"

"Is it likely I should forget, Major Hervey?" cries Emma, who is at last beginning to have doubts concerning the perfect delicacy and disinterestedness of Major Hervey's conduct.

"But 'women like moths,' you know, Emmy; women like moths—ever caught by glare! Yes, begad—the same all of you; anything with a title! Moths—glare-um-er-aw." (I like, now and then, to transcribe Major Hervey faithfully.) "His Grace quite cut Rawdon out—best thing that could happen to him, poor fellow! No real harm in Rawdon—deficiency in brain, perhaps—not an uncommon deficiency." In another minute-and-a-half Major Hervey means to propose, and be accepted. He can afford to be generously compassionate of tone towards Emma's discarded lover. "Warned him from the first—most dangerous of all associates—demi-monde, and *not* demi-monde! Duke of Malta quite cut him out. Deuced good thing for everybody—except the Duke of Malta."

Emma turns her head away, impatiently. She has wavered perpetually, during the past fortnight, in her feelings towards her elderly adorer; one day faintly liking, the next faintly disliking him, the next, perhaps, neither liking nor disliking. As he maunders on now—suddenly the revelation comes upon Emma's heart—she knows that he is absolutely obnoxious to

her! Marry this cynical, dried-up old mummy [of a Bond Street lounge, live his life of eternal pleasureless pleasure, fasten oneself on, with infinite humiliating pains, to the draggled skirts of aristocratic London society, and almost, perhaps, in time, be counted Someone! Far rather would Emma make her thirty thousand pounds a free gift to Major Hervey, marry Rawdon Crosbie on a couple of hundred a year, and travel the world with him—scanty household goods, squalling babies, and all—on a baggage-waggon!

So, you see, Emma's heart is in the right place, still.

"*Except* the Duke of Malta," repeats Adonis, who evidently thinks he has said a good thing. "For him . . . I present his Grace my felicitations! Emmy, my dear girl, we see this—er too-charming Mrs. Theobald, for whose sake Rawdon has been so ready to quarrel with us all, in her true colours to-night."

"They are very becoming colours, then," says Emma, a little sharply. "Until to-night I never really knew how handsome Mrs. Theobald was."

For—strange contradiction—Emma is disposed not only to leave off disliking Mrs. Theobald, but almost to become her champion, now that Mrs. Theobald has left off smiling exclusively on Rawdon Crosbie!

"Well—yes," drawls Adonis, raising his eyelids enough to glance across the room at Jane, who at this moment returns to the ball-room on the Duke of Malta's arm. "Fine grown young woman, enough, for those who admire the style. Never disconnect her,

myself, from a vision of pink-paper hoops—sawdust—ambulating circus—shilling admittance. Flaring advertisement of Miss Aminta Fitz-Somebody, for the astounding backward-and-forward trick act. You agree with me, my dear Emma?”

“I think Mrs. Theobald one of the nicest looking women I ever saw in my life,” says Miss Marsland.

“As you, Emmy, you, are the sweetest, the most generous! My feelings—er.” Major Hervey’s “ums” and “ers” almost impede his utterance at this tender and thrilling point. “My feelings, my dear Emma—as good a social position as any man in London—and unembarrassed—my poor mother, in the natural course of things, can’t last for ever—known you, my dearest girl, from your infancy—to know is to love—can endure suspense no longer—await your sweet little ‘Yes’ in breathless anxiety?”

Major Hervey’s cold old eyes have been fixed on the toes of his dapper little evening shoes during this impassioned declaration, so he continues in blissful ignorance of the expression of the heiress’s face. Probably, if he saw it, he would continue in blissful ignorance of what that expression portended. That a Hervey—that he, the pink and flower of all the Herveys—could be rejected by a freckled young woman, with only thirty thousand pounds for her portion, and whose family is not even alluded to in the pages of the ‘Landed Gentry’—no, it must be plain language indeed that should bring fact as monstrous as this home to Alfred Hervey’s belief!

"Your agitation is natural, charmingly natural," he whispers, turning to her with the most loverlike air of appropriation. "I have been too sudden—aw—the warmth, the impetuosity of my feelings! Fault of my character—just what Lady Carolina said to me the other day: 'My dear Major Hervey'—Lady Carolina is one of my oldest, dearest friends—'you are *too* ardent, *too* impulsive.' But I am forgiven by my little Emmy? Let me have one word, one whispered word, to say that I am forgiven?"

More unmistakably loverlike grows Major Hervey's manner. His whiskers tickle his little Emmy's ear; his withered old lips are within a couple of inches of her cheek. She looks up; she sees Rawdon's eyes, from the other end of the room, watching her earnestly. And all Emma's resolutions, if indeed they ever for a moment really wavered, became irrevocably fixed.

"I don't quite see what I can have to forgive, Major Hervey, but I forgive you all the same. I have had quarrelling enough of late to last me for the rest of my life."

"Quarrelling? Never, Emmy, between me and you!"

"No. What could we have to quarrel about? I was thinking of Rawdon."

Major Hervey is silent. Has she understood him, or has she not? Adonis looks doubtfully out of the corners of his eyes at the thirty thousand pounds—I mean at poor Emmy. He raises his scented handkerchief, with a graceful flourish, to his long nose—

“ums,” “ahs,” clears his throat; then, in the following fervent language, brings things to a point:—

“We shall live in town, of course—miserable if I live anywhere but in town. Nice little house near the parks. All the best people in London charmed to visit my wife—any girl must command a position as *my* wife. Out of the season stay about at country houses—asked to all the best country houses in England. My Emma will be glad of the advantages of a town life when she is married?”

“I—I shan’t care a bit where I live when I am married,” cries Emma, flaming scarlet, “so long as I marry the right person; and unless I do that I’ll never marry at all, for no one can say I was an old-maid *of necessity*, at least no one who knew about us here in Chalkshire.”

Is the freckled young woman an utter fool? thinks Major Hervey, his old eyes growing wickedder and wickedder. Must one say, grossly, “Will you marry me, or will you not?” before she can sufficiently arouse from her wretched provincial stupefaction to answer?

“And am *I* not the right person?” he asks, this time throwing a tenderness impossible even for provincial stupidity to misinterpret into his voice.

“No, indeed, you are not,” cries Emma, promptly. “If you won’t let it pass as a joke, Major Hervey—if you insist on making me say disagreeable things—indeed, you are not.”

Adonis draws his small person together as if he had had a galvanic shock.

“Your manner during the last ten days has been signally at variance with such a declaration,” he remarks——

“——I know it has,” interrupts Emma, beginning to fan herself desperately, and getting hot and confused. “I was so angry and so miserable after my quarrel with Rawdon; and of course I looked up to you almost like I do to mamma; and you were always ready to say hard things about Rawdon—yes, you were, Major Hervey—and I was wicked enough to be pleased to hear them; and now—now I think you would have been much more our friend if you had tried to smooth things over. If we hadn’t all been so hard upon him, everything might have been set straight that morning he called in Bolton Row, and he has never been home for a fortnight; I’m sure papa looks at me sometimes as if he hated me and I’ve been fond of him ever since I was a little girl,” goes on poor Emmy, all without a vestige of punctuation; “and whatever Rawdon may feel I know I can never care for any other man in the world as I do for him and what’s more I never mean to marry any one else.”

To this long outburst Adonis Hervey makes no immediate reply. Perhaps he has to command the impetuosity of his feelings as a rejected lover; certainly he has to get his breath after the stupendous, the inconceivable example of female obstinacy and ignorance which has been presented to him. When he does speak, it is in his coldest, acridest voice, with the

coldest, acridest expression of which the Hervey physiognomy is capable.

“And this is really your determination, my dear Miss Marsland—to wear the willow till you die, for the youth ‘who loved and who rode away’?”

“I shall never care for any one but Rawdon Crosbie,” says Emma. Her round brown eyes are not lovely eyes in themselves, but they fill with tears of tenderness and repentance now, and *look* lovely. “And I will never marry any one else. Of that I am determined.”

Adonis rises to his feet, passes his fingers through his whiskers, and looks down, with all the contempt his soul is capable of, at the poor infatuated, idiotic girl who has refused (Great Heaven! and the earth goes on in its appointed course!) to become the wife of Alfred Hervey!

“Faithful unto death, eh? Well, I must confess fidelity is one of the virtues I do not appreciate. Valuable bourgeois virtue, no doubt; but—um—aw—NEVER any bourgeois virtues in the Hervey family.”

And, thus saying, leaves her.

He walks superciliously down the ball-room, his opera-hat under his arm, his whole spruce little person bristling with self-consciousness as usual. He goes forth into the night, gets hold of the first hack-driver whom five shillings can bribe from his legitimate fare (even at this moment the Hervey instinct of money-saving is strong still; fain would Adonis have the job done for four-and-sixpence), and drives back to The

Hawthorns, resolved to depart from Chalkshire and from all the infatuated idiots Chalkshire contains, by the earliest train to-morrow.

During his midnight drive, in this hour of stinging, unlooked-for disappointment, does it occur to Major Hervey that two kinds of prizes matrimonial may be drawn by a man for the comfort and solace of his declining years—one of money (in the drawing of which he has failed); the other of a save-all, or domestic bonds slave, such as his own cousin Maria—a creature who, without wages, would cook for you, nurse you, fight the laundress, and in every other way stand between you and the depredations of the lower orders; be content with bachelor lodgings, never expect to accompany you to dinner-parties, and yet at all times be ready to coach you up in well-invented dinner-stories relative to the greatness of your joint ancestors? I say, does the pale ghost of Maria's love, retributive, haunt Alfred Hervey in this, his hour of humiliation and defeat?

Let us trust so, Reader. Let us trust that the one hope in existence even of a Maria Hervey may be realised.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“Good-bye for ever.”

YET another “sin worth sinning,” another dance worth dancing, is to fall to Rawdon Crosbie’s share in this life.

Jane walks up to his side, without the Duke of Malta, and asks him for it herself—just as he is standing, jealous, miserable, undecided whether he shall invite the least musical of the Miss Pippins for the ensuing waltz, or rush away from everybody, smoke a pipe of despair in the starlight, then return to his hotel, and have done with ladies and ladies’ society *for ever*.

“Can I have the honour of this waltz, Mr. Crosbie? I see I may wait for ever if I wait until your highness condescends to ask me.”

She looks beautiful, almost startingly beautiful as she speaks—her lips smiling (Jane knows a good deal about that smiling art: before the footlights has she not seen ballet-girls practise it in the face of the most atrocious bodily tortures? here, on the stage of life with adverse eyes—not those of a friendly public—watching her, shall she not show front as brave?); the hectic of her cheeks contrasting vividly with the marble of her round young neck and arms; her blue eyes all aglow with feverish light.

Rawdon looks at her like one who dreams—looks

at her with a minglement of feelings that I find it hard to describe in words. She is nothing to him, and yet, as she stands here at his side, smiling into his face, and speaking to him with that voice of hers, she is everything. The past, that has been Francis Theobald's, the future, that may be—Rawdon does not ask himself what! matter nothing. He, he alone in the world possesses the present moment, and will make the most of it. A man going to execution might surely drink with zest a draught of rarest wine offered him by some pitying hand upon his road!

She takes his arm; they stand for a minute or two in silence, and then the music begins, and they start. If Rawdon live to be an old man, must not the keen pain, the keenest enjoyment, of the next five minutes remain—no dry mental record, but a warm and living sensation—in his memory? As the waltz proceeds, he goes again through every scene of their brief friendship. He remembers the first look Jane gave him on the promenade at Spa, the ball and the "Grande Duchesse Waltzes," the walk home in the perfumed summer moonlight, their supper beside the window, the ineffaceable picture of her as she stood, the half-dead roses in her hair, and smiled good-bye to him in the early morning on the staircase. He remembers the day of the Liddington Flower Show, his jealousy, their walk—that for him might have been in Arcadia—among the flowers, and how they laughed and jested in the level sunlight! And the hours alone together in the silent garden of Theobalds, and the night

at the Prince of Wales's, and the "sermon by gaslight" on the pavement of Maddox Street . . .

And now all is over.

Just as unmistakably as a dying man knows that he is dying, Rawdon Crosbie knows that his ill-starred passion, with all it has given and all it has taken away, is in its death-agony. He is drinking the last dregs of the poison-cup, and the poison tastes like nectar to the last.

When the waltz is finished, Jane declares herself tired, and, instead of walking about the room on Rawdon's arm, takes possession of the first vacant chair that comes to hand, Rawdon placing himself at her side.

They are, as it chances, exactly opposite poor Emmy, who was partnerless during the last dance, and who is sitting in the same place where Adonis left her, some quarter of an hour ago.

"Rawdon," cries Jane, apropos of nothing, and turning her eyes full upon the lad's face, "that waltz was our good-bye. Did you know it? Not the cut eternal—you and I will never come to a cut, Rawdon—but good-bye all the same. Well, when people go away, they sometimes ask a favour of the friend they leave—don't they? I want to ask a favour of you."

"Going away!" repeats Rawdon, blankly. "And are you going away, Mrs. Theobald? Are you going to leave Chalkshire?"

"Yes, I'm going to leave Chalkshire. There was no great love between us from the beginning;" Jane

has never read Shakspeare, but she has got a little stock of her own of stage quotations; "there was no great love between us from the beginning, and it has pleased God to decrease it on further acquaintance. Chalkshire air doesn't agree with me, so I'm going"—a quiver, as though some spasm of pain had seized her, contracts her lips—"I'm going to have a change from it. Well, that is not what I wanted to talk to you about. If I ask a favour of you, my dear boy, will you promise beforehand to grant it? You'll never repent it, if you do, Rawdon; I haven't much good left in me, I know, but I'm not quite so vile as to want to hurt you. Will you promise?"

"Most faithfully," says Rawdon Crosbie, without a second's hesitation. "You should know that pretty well, I think, without going through the form of asking."

"Go this moment—no, not this moment, *I* want you for a little while longer—but go the moment you leave me to Miss Marsland, and try once more to set things straight: ask her once more to forgive you. She will not say 'No' to-night, I'll answer for that."

Rawdon Crosbie turns white to the very lips. "This—this is the last thing I should have expected you to ask me, Mrs. Theobald."

"No doubt of it," says Jane quietly. "But everything that is least to be expected *is* happening to-night. Did you see me dance my lancers, Mr. Crosbie? I was in the same set with Lady Laurie, and a Miss Archdeacon, and your mamma! And the set did not melt

away like the first one I tried with Dolly Standish, and the ladies all gave me the tips of their fingers, and managed not to faint. I have learnt a lesson by that, Rawdon, my dear. If one would rough-ride the prejudices of good English society, one must have a Duke of Malta, not a Dolly Standish, for one's partner."

She laughs, rather loudly; Emma Marsland, across the room, can hear her. But 'tis a laugh from which all the old merriment, all the hearty ring which once made Jane's laughter so good a thing to listen to, has fled.

"And so, remembering the lancers, I think we may say that everything least likely to happen is happening to-night. Rawdon," after a second or two, "some day or another, a long time hence it may be, there's just one more thing I should be glad for you to do. But you needn't promise about this—do it only if it seems good to you. Some day or another, then, when you are a steady old married man, and when you are talking to your wife about the past, I should like you to say to her, that before I left Chalkshire, I, Jane Theobald, wished her happiness, and that if I ever gave her pain, I was sorry for it. Do you hear?"

"I hear," answers Rawdon, very low, and not once raising his eyes to Jane's face.

"And without my making any fine company-speeches my dear boy, you must take for granted all the good things I wish you! The only happy hours I ever had in Chalkshire, were the hours I spent with you. I shall like, whatever becomes of me, to look back to them,

and to remember how pluckily you used to stand my friend!” And now she goes on, a little hastily: “I don’t know that there’s anything more for us to talk about. ‘Good-bye for ever’ is a nasty thing to say, Rawdon, so we won’t say it! We won’t think that our ‘good-bye for ever’ is really being spoken at this moment.”

“And I shall never feel that it has been spoken at all,” says Rawdon, stoutly. “As long as we both of us live, Mrs. Theobald, I shall never feel that ‘good-bye for ever’ has been said between you and me.”

“You think so now. The day will come—yes, Rawdon, yes—the future is uncertain, impossible to say how any of us may turn out in the future, but the day will come, depend upon it, when you’ll thank your stars ‘good-bye for ever’ *was* said between you and me; and then——Oh heaven! whatever we do, don’t let us get lachrymose and sentimental!” With a sort of start Jane interrupts herself thus (almost within ear-shot, does not the Duke of Malta stand watching her?): “You’ll want all that kind of sugary material, you know, child, for the grand reconciliation scene in which you and Miss Marsland are coming on! It won’t be a very hard scene to act, take my word for it. People seldom fail in pleading when they really want to be pardoned. The question is, how am I, outside in the cold, to know that the pardon is spoken?”

She pauses for a minute, then selects a white moss-rosebud from the flowers she holds in her hand, and gives it to him.

“Here, take this, Rawdon—I have excellent eyes, I shall see it wherever I may be in the room—and wear it until the moment your sweetheart says ‘Yes.’ Then I, outside in the cold, must have my sign, and the sign shall be, that you take my flower, my last gift, alas! from your button-hole, and, in the agitation of your feelings, let it drop—accidentally, of course—at your sweetheart’s feet. You promise?”

Before Rawdon has time to answer, the Duke of Malta advances to claim her, with such an expression of assured success, such a flush of triumph upon his vacuous Beaudesert face! Jane rises, takes his arm with a quick, half-sullen air of submission, then turns once more to Rawdon Crosbie.

“You promise me?” she repeats in a whisper. “I shall feel—well, about the only pleasure anything could give me to-night when I receive my sign.”

And he promises. They are the last words ever spoken between them. Upon the Duke of Malta’s arm Jane passes away among the crowd of dancers; and in another minute Rawdon Crosbie has taken the vacant chair by Emma Marsland’s side.

In a poem or a play, men, at all stirring moments of the plot, express their feelings, I remark, in language artistically adequate to the occasion. In everyday commonplace reality, they talk every day commonplace still: plead for their mistress’s lost favour much in the same strain and tone as they would ask her to pass them the toast at breakfast—only that in asking for

toast they would probably stammer rather less, and so approach a degree or two nearer to eloquence.

"What—not dancing, Emmy?" This is the observation with which Rawdon, his heart really torn by conflicting emotions, begins the scene that he knows must, one way or another, govern the course of his whole future life.

"No, I'm not dancing this time," says Emma; "I've danced as much as I wish to dance this evening."

"It's getting awfully hot, don't you think so?"

"Yes, but if the windows are open on both sides there is such a draught. It's better to be too hot than to sit in a draught."

"Well, perhaps it is. You won't give me another dance to-night, I suppose, Emma?"

"Yes, Rawdon, I will, if you wish for one."

"I did not like to ask you sooner; I thought Adonis was sure to have filled all the vacant places in your programme."

"Poor dear Adonis!" What woman can speak of the man she has refused without some slight inflection of voice betraying his secret? "Adonis does not dance round dances, you know."

"And you will dance this galop with me, then?"

"I shall be very happy."

But neither of them rise, and both keep their eyes fixed rigidly straight before them, as people do who are conscious that they are not saying what they would like to say if they dared and knew how.

"Mrs. Theobald is looking very well to-night," re-

marks Emma, breaking the ice at last. "I mean as far as looks go. I—I'm sorry for her, Rawdon." Timidly poor Emmy volunteers this, her first concession. "People are saying that Mr. Theobald has gone away and left her, and there's such a wretched look on her face all the time she is laughing and talking with the Duke."

"You could hardly expect a woman in her position, alone in a roomful of people who have shunted and blackballed her, to look very jolly," answers Rawdon.

"If I had to act the last few weeks over again, I know that I, for one, would behave very differently towards Mrs. Theobald—but it's no use looking back now. The past is past and done with!" And Emma gives a melancholy sigh as she thinks of the lovely wedding-dresses from Miss Fletcher's, the orange-blossoms, the Honiton veil (tried on in strictest confidence before one's eight bridesmaids), all locked away, painfully spotless, drearily intact, in the brand-new portmanteaux and travelling-cases that were to have accompanied Mr. and Mrs. Rawdon Crosbie upon their wedding-tour.

"*Is* the past done with?" exclaims Rawdon. "Emma," and his voice trembles, "*is* the past, the time when we loved and trusted each other so well, gone by for ever between you and me?"

"Oh, Rawdon,—oh, don't!—oh, what would mamma think?—oh, I know the Pippins are looking!" cries Emma, her heart swelling with a sudden rapturous hope.

“I have been to blame in every way—a fool! I deserved to lose you; I don’t deserve your forgiveness, but I ask it! Emma, thinking of yourself, and of your own happiness alone, not of any suffering your answer might cost me, is it possible you can say you pardon me?—is it possible there is room for me in your affection yet?”

And now comes to Rawdon Crosbie the most strangely-blent moment conceivable of pleasure and of pain. For Emma, such honest love, such tender womanly forgiveness upon her face as makes her more than pretty, falters “Yes;” and Jane, standing outside in the cold—just opposite the lovers, that is to say, animated and radiant, on the Duke of Malta’s arm—must have her sign! He takes the flower, as she bade him, from his button-hole, and holds it irresolutely.

“How odious I used to be about your bits of flower, your withered weeds!” cries Emma, presently—poor Emma, who feels in her immense new-born happiness that she can never blame herself enough for the jealousy through which that happiness was so nearly wrecked! “I’m wiser now, Rawdon. I ask no impertinent questions about your white rosebud, although I can form a pretty shrewd guess who gave it you. Your button-hole was without adornment, Sir, when we danced that miserable dance together at the beginning of the evening.”

“I have danced with Lydia Pippin, Augusta Brown—with I don’t know how many charming creatures since then,” says Rawdon.

And Emmy seems contented. Just at this moment, up comes Sir John Laurie to ask her for the following quadrille, the last square dance of the evening. Even in the first rose-flush of enraptured reconciliation, Emma cannot resist the honour of dancing with the county member; and as the good old gentleman, spectacles on nose, stands writing his name down on her programme, Rawdon gets an opportunity, unobserved, for giving Jane her sign.

In a crowded ball-room, everybody argus-eyed, watching everybody else's affairs, 'tis wonderful how little is known really of what goes on among the different actors. Rawdon Crosbie is evidently trying to patch things up, wise young man, with the heiress, in Major Hervey's absence. *That* all the world has been observing during the past five minutes. Who should notice such a trivial action as his raising a morsel of half-dead flower to his lips, holding it to them with a great tenderness, for a second or two, then—his sun-burnt, unsentimental face becoming livid the while—laying it gently down on the floor, just beside the hem of Miss Marsland's ball-dress, and letting it rest there? Who, I say, should notice such unimportant nonsense as all this?

"I'm sure I didn't want any other partner than you to-night," says Emmy, turning to her lover. "But one couldn't refuse Sir John—say, Rawdon, could one?"

"Perfectly impossible, my dear Emma. Now, the right thing, I suppose, for me is to solicit the honour

of fat old Lady Laurie's hand, and be your *vis-à-vis*?”

“I hope you are not beginning to laugh at one, already, Rawdon?”

“Do I look in such a very laughing mood, then, Emma?”

And Emma, after glancing at his face, is forced to confess, a little bitterly, that he does not. Rawdon Crosbie, as I have before remarked, is no expert in the art of feigning emotion.

When the waltz is over, Mrs. Theobald begins to walk about on the Duke's arm; after a time, accidentally or otherwise, passes close to the lovers as they stand talking to Mrs. Crosbie at the upper end of the room. She gives Rawdon a furtive smile of congratulation that, with all its kindness, cuts him to the heart. Then, Emma chancing at the moment to raise her head, the eyes of the two young women meet—meet, Emma Marsland may one day be glad to remember, with a look of forgiveness and reconciliation at last.

It is considered etiquette at the Lidlington public balls for “everybody” to leave together. Lady Laurie orders her carriage at two; Mrs. Coventry Brown, and all minor luminaries, order theirs at the same hour. After her quadrille with Sir John, Emma has one blissful round dance with her lover, then quits the ball-room on his arm; some bald-headed gentleman, of Chalkshire repute you may be sure, escorting Mrs. Crosbie—poor Mrs. Crosbie, ready to weep with maternal

joy at the happy turn events have taken, but dignified and well-bred in her demeanour towards Providence to the last.

In the vestibule occurs the usual crush of cloaked and hooded ladies, and of gentlemen tripping themselves up over the ladies' trains. "Charming ball, was it not?" "Oh, charming! Never saw your daughters look so well." "Good-night, *dear* Lady Laurie." "Hope you will not suffer from the heat!" "Hope you will not suffer from the cold!" So the Chalkshire notables, treading on each other's satin toes, and murmuring platitudes in each other's tired faces, fight their way to the front, and vanish from the stage of this little drama.

"Mrs. Coventry Brown's carriage."

Forth steps the majestic woman, liker to a purring white cat than ever, with her swansdown cloak drawn up around her throat; the two youthful white cats, also in swansdown, following.

"Mrs. Pippin's carriage."

The watchful barn-door mamma, and her brood of elderly chickens, pass away out of our sight.

"Mrs. Crosbie's carriage."

No; the name, this time, has been shouted wrong. Mrs. Crosbie's carriage next but one.

"Mrs. Francis Theobald's carriage stops the way."

She flutters down the steps, in her white dress and flowers, at the Duke of Malta's side; the light from the lamps outside shining on her; flushed, successful—as women count success—yet with that same

hunted look, of which I have spoken, upon her face still: a vision several persons among this Chalkshire assemblage are not likely to forget.

The Duke stands bareheaded, eagerly whispering to her for a minute or more after she is seated, heedless it would seem of the string of county carriages, whose progress Mrs. Francis Theobald's hack vehicle impedes.

He whispers more and more eagerly; Jane never answers. At last—"If you expect me to remember anything about it, you had better write the name down," she remarks, in a cold hard sort of tone: Rawdon Crosbie is near enough to hear her words—"I never remembered a promise or an address in my life."

She hands the Duke her ball-programme; he scribbles a word or two on the back, and gives it to her again, with another last whisper.

And then the door of the carriage is shut, and Jane drives away, the Duke of Malta watching her progress, into the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER XIX.

Along the Railroad to Ruin.

AWAY into the darkness; back, through the hush and sweetness of the August night, *home*. Hannah, the nursemaid, the only watcher in the grim old house, Hannah, with nerves already shaken by rats and creaking boards, stares open-mouthed at the apparition of Mrs. Theobald's face; ghastly, now that it has cooled from the flush and excitement of the ball; the blue eyes weary, yet with an unnatural glow of fire in their weariness; the hair pushed back from the temples; the lips dry and scarlet; the whole expression of the face changed.

Will Mrs. Theobald please to take anything? Yes, Mrs. Theobald will take some brandy-and-water when she gets upstairs; the proportion of brandy not small, Hannah! And then she submits to having pins taken out, and flowers unfastened; submits to Hannah's talk, and—and wants nothing more! Wants nothing but to be left alone, within locked doors, the reflection of her own face in the looking-glass, the sight of Blossy, asleep and rosy in her cot, for company.

In the fine old days, when rack and thumbscrew were called in to the aid of orthodox social opinions, the accused, we read, did, after the first great wrench of nerve and muscle, feel little more; man's physical capacity for suffering being, thank Heaven, less boundless than man's capacity for inflicting it. Jane should

have gone through the worst by now, if the same law hold good in the moral as in the material world, which unfortunately it does not.

“In the infinite spirit is room
For the pulse of an infinite pain.”

She has been in torture throughout the evening; was in torture while she danced, smiled, planned, radiant with “success,” the ruin of all her future years; is in torture now.

The room she and Theobald occupy is the same best or purple room to which her sister-in-law led her on the night when she first tasted respectability: there is the ghostly four-poster in which Cousin James died; there are the ghostly watch-pockets—there the two prim dressing-tables. Nothing altered, outwardly. Only the life that then was in its spring laid low by sudden blight, only an unimportant unit about to be added to the sum of shipwrecked and abandoned human waifs with which the world’s highways are overstocked!

Is it to be wondered at? Jane took her brandy-and-water at a draught as soon as the servant left her alone, and the result of the stimulant is—no merciful stupor, no kindly impairment of reason, but rather a quickened power of guaging her wretchedness to its depths. Is this crowning act of her history a thing in any way to wonder at? She remembers a score of children who learnt in the same class with her from Adolphe Dido, and who have most of them ended as she will—only with less noise and glitter. Some innate tendency of ballet-girls, probably, against which, now

that the play of life begins to "work close," 'twere vain to struggle. One's fate; as well accept fate bravely; make no whine over it! And yet, and yet—what love, resurgent, what yearning towards all things right and honest, were in her heart four hours ago! What loathing, what abhorrence, for the future to which she tacitly stands committed are in her heart now!

Taking her candle, she goes up to Blossy's cot and bends over, looking at her in a sort of blank despair. The child "features" Theobald, as the country-people say, and the likeness comes out strongest when sleep has shut the blue eyes, which are her sole resemblance to her mother. Theobald's fair hair and complexion, his forehead, his print of chin—Theobald's whole face rises before Jane's sight, with cruel distinctness, as she looks at the baby-face of his little daughter. And she turns from her abruptly—yes, turns from her with a feeling wellnigh of hatred! How should I write the word, if I did not know that love and hatred, under the overmastering influence of jealousy, are exchangeable terms?

She turns from the child, I say, and for an instant stands motionless; then, through a half-open door, walks into a small adjoining room—her husband's dressing-room. It is in disorder—Esther, the housemaid, having taken her day's junketing at the races—just as Mr. Theobald left it after dressing this morning. Three or four summer cravats, failures, are strewn about the dressing-table; the gloves in which he drove over from The Folly lie on the floor. She

stoops, and picks one of these gloves up, in I know not what passion of tenderness, clasps it tight—tight to her breast for a moment, then flings it from her with a gesture of abhorrence! Melodramatic, highly; but coming from Jane, natural. If she were dying, the poor theatrical-nurtured girl must be theatrical still. After this—shutting and locking the door, as though she would lock *him* away from her thoughts with the action—she comes back to her room, and finishes undressing.

By now a faintest primrose tinge has begun to penetrate through the heavy window-curtains. Jane draws one back, and sees the world already entered upon a new day; sees the chill light resting on the hoar old elms round Theobalds, and on the faintly-outlined Chalk-downs, that were a thousand years before she was, and will be a thousand years after she has sinned and suffered her little hour and gone to sleep again. What matter her sorrows or her wrongs in this great system of things wherein she holds so poor a place? Of what account are they or she to any one? . . . And then return to her mind the protestations of life-long devotion, the offers of riches, freedom, “position,” which have been incessantly whispered in her ear throughout the evening. And though she loathes the offers and him who made them alike; more than this, though—with wisdom prematurely learnt in the sharpest of all schools—she appraises both protestations and offers at their exact value; it seems to her that there can be no going back now, that what is coming is not only inevitable, but best.

All times of revolution, in nations, or in a girl's ignorant heart, are times of lightning speed. Four hours ago, reckoning time by ordinary computation, Jane was swayed by one fierce passion, simply: in an access of jealousy, desired swift and sure and desperate retaliation upon one offender. She has gone through a whole lifetime since then; will be avenged, not only for her bruised and despised love's sake, not on Theobald only now, but on the world; will throw down the gauntlet, not merely to this Chalkshire respectability, which has flouted her, but to *all* respectability. (An old, ever-new story, Reader: society revolting against the class; the individual revolting against, and so justifying, society.) How puerile, childish, seems that scheme she once entertained of returning to the stage! What—go through the bitter toil, the heat, the cold, of that hardest slavery, to win the applause of a capricious public, the paltry earnings of some forty or fifty shillings a week; while Theobald, by good luck rid without signal disgrace of his encumbrance, might return, *honourably*, to the world that had found no place for her, the world of Lady Rose Golithly!

Work wants a sound heart. If at any time, while he loved and was faithful to her, Francis Theobald had happened to ruin himself utterly, yes, to the wanting of bread, never doubt that Jane would have gone back to the stage—short skirts, hard work, modest pay, and all—and have pirouetted bravely for his support, yes, and have had him wear fine lavender gloves and em-

broidered linen, and smoke the best attainable cigars, out of her poor superfluities!

That is just the sort of stuff she is made of.

Not now, not now!

She moves across to her dressing-table, where lie her soiled ball-gloves, her faded bouquet, her programme; she takes up this last, and looks down through the list of dances—each “Valse d’Amour” or “Galop Infernal” marking a station of her journey along the railroad to ruin! Then turns over to the other side, and, in the cold green daylight, reads the words the Duke wrote there in pencil, as he stood bareheaded, the county watching, I will not say envying, her “success,” beside the door of her carriage.

Only three or four words: the address of a certain hotel in Brussels, with his Grace’s initials scrawled in monogram underneath. But Jane’s face turns suddenly ashen as she reads them. Pain, like pleasure, has its intoxications; pain, hitherto, has lifted her, in some measure, above the level of her guilt. The sight of those few words in the Duke’s handwriting, and in her possession, makes her realise, with a shiver of actual bodily terror, *what* all this is that is befalling her.

God, can she escape, may she escape! Help her, if she be not already past the reach of help! She hides the programme out of sight in her dressing-table drawer—as though its secret could be deciphered by any eyes save her own—and going up to her bed, not to the side where Blossy lies asleep, stands, her ashen face growing more ashen, her cold hands clasped to-

gether rigidly; then falls down on her knees and tries to pray.

She and Min received what would be counted but a heathen kind of bringing-up from poor, strong-hearted, weak-headed Uncle Dick. When the children were young, however, Uncle Dick's wife did, in her scanty leisure, in her unenlightened way, teach these heaven-forsaken little theatre rats to go on their knees and repeat a certain form of words at night. And Jane has clung to the habit since; no power of Theobald's, even, being able to shake her from what he has often called the "one mild hypocrisy" of her character.

Hypocrisy to Jane were a physical impossibility. Had Theobald used the word superstition, he might have been nearer the mark; for, in truth, the "prayer" which has constituted the sole nourishment of her spiritual life is one I should blush to submit to the eyes of educated readers, a formula scarcely to be ranked higher than the distich of which "Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John" is the first line. And still it is a prayer; an outcry of weakness to strength; an acknowledgment of something beyond, above, this visible life of ours and its needs. And formula, superstition, parrot-like repetition of soulless words—call it by what name one will—Jane has never, knowingly, laid her head on her pillow since she was a child without going through it.

She goes through it now; now, for the first time in her existence, probably, learns what prayer means.

For she learns that her formula means nothing! She is staring at the sickly daylight on the opposite wall, and kneeling, with her hands joined and lips moving,—and her heart dumb. Oh, all you who have suffered, do you not know the meaning of that awful impotence?—her heart dumb!

Well, these things cannot be forced. Prayerless, hopeless, unrepentant, nothing remains for Jane Theobald but to get into her bed, and watch the green light turn to gold, then to white; presently, to hear the birds sing, and then the whistle of the gardener's boy, as he passes under her window to his work. After a time, the servants begin to stir in the house, and Blossy, waking, flings her soft arms round her mother's neck, and asks, as she has done every morning since Saturday, "Why Dada him not here?" and must have her game of romps as usual.

And Blossy has her game; sings nigger melodies at the pitch of her shrill voice; dances fantasias on the bed, barefooted, with night-gown artistically upraised in the morning sunshine; Jane forced to listen to her, forced to look at her! For what might the servants think—so low has she sunk already, Jane, who, as long as she was honest, cared not a straw for the opinion of the whole world—what might the servants think if she rang earlier than on another morning to have the child taken away to the nursery?

By-and-by comes her own getting-up and dressing. Her limbs ache as they never ached after any ball before, her hands tremble, her throat feels parched; and

still, thanks to yesterday's scorching on the race-course, or to the fever of the night, her cheeks retain their colour. When she comes down-stairs she is able to force her voice, as near as may be, into its accustomed tone. The servants, if questioned hereafter, will be ready, doubt not, to affirm that "Missus never looked better nor in better spirits, and took her breakfast hearty, and seemed quite cheerful with Miss Blossy." Trustworthy, discriminative souls! Is it not upon evidence like this that the history of half our fireside tragedies is written?

And the morning hours drag slowly by. Blossy's dinner-time comes, and then, as Jane sits at table attending to the child, and making what pretence she can of swallowing food herself, arrives a servant from The Folly with a note—the same that should have been sent over to her last night—from Mr. Theobald.

"Dear Jane," her lord and master writes, "after what you said to-day, I conclude you will not mind going to the ball alone. Lord Barty Beaudesert has asked me to stay with him for a few days on board his yacht at Cowes. I start to-night. Address to me 'On board the Laïs, at Cowes,' if you should have occasion to write. Impossible to say for certain when I shall be back.

"Your affectionate husband,
"FRANCIS THEOBALD.

"P.S.—If you want money, you will find some in

my Russia-leather case; the key must be in one of my waistcoat-pockets in the dressing-room."

Well, the postscript is important; more important, possibly, than Mr. Theobald imagined when he wrote it. Not many human actions, virtuous or criminal, can come to fruition unless they have cash as a basis; none, certainly, involving railway fares and steamboat tickets; and Jane was brought by current household expenses to her last sovereign yesterday.

Mr. Theobald's thoughtfulness is opportune.

She goes upstairs to his dressing-room, searches for the key, happily or unhappily, finds it, and gets what money she believes will suffice to carry her to Brussels—eight or ten pounds in gold. This done, she divests herself of the few trinkets she chances to have about her, her chain and watch, a brooch of some slender value, her rings (except her wedding-ring; she will wear that a little longer yet); then puts on her hat and shawl, and stands ready to go, richer only by those eight or ten sovereigns and by her wedding-ring than on the day when she came to Francis Theobald as a bride.

Now there is one last farewell to be uttered—farewell between mother and child, between soul and body. Get that wrench over with as little thinking about it as possible, and quickly. The train by which she means to go is express, exact to a second. Not too much time left her, as it is, for walking to the station.

Blossy is amusing herself alone in the breakfast-

room downstairs. This room, as I have said, is the cheerfullest one in the house—the room into which Jane has collected together everything in the shape of mirror or ornament Theobalds can boast. It makes a charming little theatre for Bloss, who indeed wants no other entertainment when she has got an abundance of looking-glass to reflect her own small figure, and represent imaginary audiences as she sings and dances.

Especially contented with the world, and everything in it, is Miss Theobald at this moment. Auntie Min brought her a gift of gorgeous cherry-coloured sash and shoulder-knots from London yesterday, requesting, as she gave it, that the finery should be enjoyed, not locked away, too fine for use, out of Blossy's jurisdiction. So over her little holland house-frock the child, in the seventh heaven of enraptured vanity, disports her grandeur.

Nor is she quite without company.

The paper of the room is of quaint old-fashioned design, all white-and-gold arabesque, with impossible palm-trees intermingled, and small green monkeys sitting or clinging by impossible tails and hands among the boughs. Well, as Jane enters in her travelling-dress, leaden-eyed, leaden-hearted, Bloss, with infinite grace and vanity of gesture, is just exhibiting her ribbons to the monkeys—curtseying to this one, extending a shoulder-knot to that, holding forth the smart fringed end of her sash, with disdainful sense of superiority, to another. She takes no notice whatsoever of her mother's entrance, but continues, self-ab-

sorbed and grave, to bestow her salutations around. So Jane goes up, and lays her gloved hand upon her head.

“Good-bye, Bloss,” she says, in a thick hoarse voice: then snatches hold of her tight, kisses neither lips nor brow, but buries her face for a moment among the child’s mass of silken curls.

“Mine zibbons—pitty zibbons!” cries Bloss, stroking her ruffled finery with tender fingers, and freeing herself with a little push from the interruption. “Me dot pitty zibbons.”

And then back to her bows and curtseys and attitudinizing before her friends the monkeys.

A natural action enough, that push. What matters the universe, with all the love it contains, to a child still untired of its last new plaything?

But to Jane’s ruined heart a death-stab.

Even the child wants her not; the child is Theobald’s—will be better off, “both as regards this world and the next,” without her than with her.

So that wrench is over—the one good-bye she had to speak, spoken. And now out into the open daylight, into the sight of men, and on with her journey.

CHAPTER XX.

Fast and Loose with Destiny.

JANE'S destination is Dover; from thence, by night-mail to Ostend, and then on to Brussels—after which point our story is not further concerned.

She has made no plan in detail of the journey, and on reaching Dover learns, to her dismay, that she will have more than three hours to wait. The Belgian steamer, so one of the railway porters informs her, does not start till seven—passengers not allowed on board till half-past six. Where is she to spend these hours? how kill this hideous interval of time, without the narcotic of action or movement to deaden her pain—still the remorse that already, the first stage of her journey scarce over, burns at her heart?

She knows several of the large Dover hotels, having stopped there often in better innocent days with Theobald; but dreading recognition will show her face at none of these—will sooner bear her three hours' ordeal, alone, unnoticed, in the ladies' waiting-room at the station. However, the atmosphere of the waiting-room makes her faint and sick; after a time, too, she begins to think (Jane grown a coward in such matters!) that the austere-looking woman who guards the water-bottle and tracts, eyes her with suspicion: and so wanders forth into the streets, resolved, if walking be possible, to pass the remainder of the time until she can go on board in the open air.

She finds that it is not possible. Walking wants strength, and Jane, after ten or twelve minutes' trial, discovers, with terror, that she has no strength left. At last, seeing a small but decent inn, not far from the harbour, she enters it, and in a halting voice asks the tawdrily-dressed landlady, who comes out to meet her, if she can have a sitting-room to herself for a couple of hours. She has to wait until the departure of the Ostend boat at seven.

The woman gives her a hard look—the logic of a landlady's facts disinclining her, doubtless, towards female travellers devoid of luggage or ostensible masculine protection. “A sitting-room? Why, yes; folks can have a parlour to themselves, of course, by paying for it, but——”

“I will pay you what you choose to ask me,” is Jane's answer, hurriedly drawing out and opening her purse.

At which the hard look mollifies. *Next* to masculine protection, what so respectable as a well-filled purse! “Ah, the young lady is going across the water, is she? 'Tis to be hoped, for her sake, the night will be fine; but the sailors don't like the look of the sky, and the wind is changing fast.” Then, after leading her some steps along a stifling beery passage, mine hostess shows her guest into a stifling beery parlour, overlooking the harbour and shipping, and redolent of both, and leaves her alone.

The furniture of this parlour consists of a rickety horsehair couch, a table, a couple of chairs, and a

shelf holding a few odd volumes of musty leather-bound books. Its adornments are: Dover Castle in shellwork, a bunch of grotesquely unnatural feather tulips, and a mezzotint engraving of H.M. King William the Fourth; H.M., curveting on a lambswool charger through a lambswool forest, with the towers of Windsor, royally defying every rule of perspective, in the background.

Well, before Jane has been here three minutes, it seems to her as though this miserable place and its belongings—yes, even to the grouping of the unnatural tulips, the simper on the face of majesty—had been familiar objects for years. With such ease do we attune ourselves, in certain overstrung states of mind and body, to each successive accompaniment, or background of our pain! Her first hope, when the woman left her alone, was—that she might sleep. No matter how uninviting the couch: she would rest her throbbing temples on its pillow, in an attitude, at least, of sleep. And sleep will not come near her. The very attempt at rest has but quickened the unrest of her brain. No escape that way. She must *face* conscience, at last: must bear whatever torture her own thickcoming, morbidly vivid thoughts have power to inflict upon her.

They shape themselves, bit by bit, into a retrospect, mocking her sick heart by its brightness, of all the happiest periods of her life. Blankly staring at the opposite wall, and at the face of simpering mezzotint majesty, Jane bethinks her of the childish years when she and Min ran wild about the precincts of Drury

Lane and Covent Garden—of her shortlived girlish dreams of theatrical success—of that first day when Theobald “stood, and fell in love with her,” despite her darned merino and the shabby roses in her hat, from the half-lit slips of the Royal!

. . . She did not care for him so very much, she remembers, in the early days of their courtship; or so, confident of her power, she used to tell him. She had seen other men she fancied as well before. Mr. Theobald, if he liked, might go. Presents?—oh, she wouldn’t take a present from a prince! Give up the stage and become a lady? With her agreement signed, and her dresses ready, and success certain,—thanks! The honour of Mr. Theobald’s preference was great, but she preferred liberty to honour: was too young to know her own mind yet: Mr. Theobald might go. And he went: for two days, during which the world turned black to her, stayed away; then, suddenly, when she was beginning to think he had taken her at her word and gone for ever, made his appearance at the old corner of Wellington Street, as she was returning home from rehearsal, and said: “Jane, my dear, I want your answer to a certain question—there can be only one answer for you to give, you know—Will you throw up your engagement and marry me?” And there *was* only one answer for her to give. She threw up her engagement and married him.

She remembers their most Bohemian wedding-day: Theobald, in a morning suit, smoking his pipe until he reached the vestry-door; herself in a bonnet made

by her own hands, and a print-dress; with only just sufficient witnesses in the gloomy London church to render the marriage legal. She remembers their honeymoon (the honeymoon that to Jane's heart never quite waned) on the Continent.

Summer was in its bloom; they went to Ems, Frankfort, Baden-Baden. Oh, the sunshine of those days! Oh, the nights, white with stars, when, hands furtively clasped, they used to wander, listening a little to the music, and much to their own whispers, among dim-lit Kursaal gardens! Oh, the out-of-door dinners and suppers, those two alone—wanting no other guest, save the invisible guest, Love, who sat between them!

She thinks of their winter in Homburg, of her money troubles—light ones in sooth; was not Theobald her lover still? Then of her child's birth; of Blossy's first imperfect words; of the day, at ten months old, when, miracle of a baby, Blossy ran from her knee alone to Theobald's arms. She remembers . . . Ah, my God, no! These are not things to think of, unless one would go mad outright. Think, instead, of later cruel days—of the neglect, the faithlessness, that are the justification of one's guilt. . . . And thought will not be put in shackles. Thought turns from the living, miserable present; flies back, swift-winged, to the honeyed years that are dead—the years, with all their sins of omission, undarkened by a solitary cloud of coldness or estrangement.

How she has *loved* life since her marriage! Home-

less, spendthrift, vagrant though they have been, how few thorns have grown among their roses! They have lived, openly and avowedly, for pleasure only, and have found it, or Jane has: pleasure in her dress and balls and vanities, pleasure in her child and husband, pleasure in the mere fact of drawing breath, and of being young and fair.

And now all is over; not a wreck of the old joy left; and through no fault of hers—our souls are kinder to us, sometimes, than life is—through no fault of hers. Inch by inch, foot by foot, she has been hurried towards this precipice, upon whose last ledge she stands, wanting, striving to regain her footing, but borne down ever by fate, stronger than her will.

If society—if six, four, two—nay, if one kindly human heart had bidden her Godspeed when she came to Chalkshire: if the harsh judgments wrongly visited on her had been visited, righteously, on Lady Rose Golightly; if—but why make one's weary brain wearier with such "ifs!" Does right, does justice exist in the world at all? "There's a law for the rich and a law for the poor: a law for men and a law for women: a law for the well-born, and a law for those who are not." The words spoken by Charlotte Theobald yesterday return, abruptly, to her remembrance, and with them returns the thought of Charlotte Theobald's outstretched hand: "If you want a friend, and the time may come sooner than you think, you'll know where to find one."

In that chill offer was there just a last chance of

salvation for her? Is it possible—Heaven, is it possible?—that it might be her means of salvation yet?

She starts up from the couch, and for a minute or two walks up and down the room; then, her heavy limbs aching after even this exertion, sinks down again into her former place.

Salvation possible, and at the hands of Francis Theobald's sisters! What! return, a suppliant for their compassion; tell the truth (even in such a strait as this no plan involving falsehood crosses Jane's imagination; to whatever depth she fall, the one virtue of truth must remain linked to her thousand other crimes); standing in the Miss Theobalds' starched drawing-room—with the curious self-torturing instinct of the miserable, she puts the whole scene before herself in detail—looking into the Miss Theobalds' starched faces, make her confession. She had abandoned home, child, husband; deliberately, and of her own free will, set out upon the path of dishonour; then, at the first stage of her journey, pluck failing her, had come back, repentant, to sue for mercy! What answer would a woman receive at the hands of such women, of any women, to such an appeal? Charlotte Theobald would stand by her—little doubt of that—as Jane has seen a policeman stand by some wretch whom the crowd would roughly handle, but whom it is the policeman's duty to protect and keep intact for the official tortures of the condemned cell or penitentiary She, Jane Theobald, would be in a kind of select condemned cell, or private family penitentiary,

for the rest of her life, were she to give herself over to the law in the person of Charlotte Theobald. A woman, not of aristocratic birth, who has made one false step, half a false step, *and acknowledged it*, and retrograded, must, as society at present is framed, be branded with a scarlet or other letter until her life's end.

Why, to go bravely on, run the whole gauntlet of shame, with shame's chances (not a few, take them altogether) of final success, were better wisdom, as far as any prospect of social rehabilitation goes!

She raises her eyes, and Majesty seems to give a smile of benign approval at the sentiment!

After a time re-enters the hostess, suspicious, no doubt, that the solitary female traveller may be making away with the chairs and tables. The solitary female traveller rests wearily in the same place on the couch, her head lying back against the wall, her face fevered and haggard. Will she take dinner?—tea? Will she take refreshments—tartly this—of *no* kind? Soda-and-brandy. To be sure. Excellent thing a soda-and-B. before a sea-voyage, and a Captain's biscuit with it. The last not ordered by Jane, but suggested, as costing an extra threepence, by the hostess. In another minute some nauseous compound in a tumbler, with a plate of villainous-looking fossil sea-biscuits, are set before her.

Jane has scarcely tasted food since her luncheon on the race-course yesterday. Excitement has been

her meat—no very healthy nutriment, as we know, but all-satisfying while it lasts. It satisfies her still. She swallows the contents of the tumbler; in spite of its nauseous taste, feels strengthened by it. Then, with a sense that consumption of food in some shape is required of her, puts one of the fossil biscuits into her pocket, and rings the bell; desiring to pay quickly that which she owes for her entertainment, and *start*.

“Use of sitting-room, a shilling. Brandy-and-soda, a shilling. Biscuits, threepence. Attendance, ditto. Total, two-and-sixpence.”

Jane draws forth her purse to requite this last hospitality her native land shall offer her. It contains only gold—yellow tempting sovereigns; won, did she but know it, at The Folly overnight! And again the hostess's hard eyes soften humanly. Attendance is charged threepence; may be made sixpence if a guest has a mind to behave handsome; and will the lady be kind enough to wait for a minute or so? She must just step inside her own sitting-room behind the bar to get change.

The lady waits—standing beside the shelf of leather-bound volumes I have mentioned And now occurs to Jane Theobald one of those curious chance Revelations, which at seasons, in places the most unexpected, through agencies the most outwardly trivial, do shine in on our souls in their hour of direst necessity. She stands, I say, waiting—inert, half-stupefied. Her body is weak, the brandy, of its kind, was strong. And, as she stands thus, sees a little marker of red

ribbon appearing above the edges of one of the dingy books.

If the ribbon had been black, Jane had probably never noticed it. The red strikes her attention, mechanically. Mechanically she takes the book—an odd volume of sermons by Bishop Porteous—from the shelf; opens it listlessly at the place marked, and reads, in the big pale type, on the yellow-ribbed paper of a century ago, this passage:

“And as it sometimes happens that they who have the weakest and most distempered frames, by means of an exact regimen and unshaken perseverance in rule and method, outlive those of a robuster make and more luxuriant health; so there are abundant instances, where men of the most perverse dispositions and most unruly turn of mind, by keeping a steady guard upon their weak points, and gradually, but continually correcting their defects, going on from strength to strength, and from one degree of perfection to another, have at length arrived at an higher pitch of virtue than those for whom nature had done much, and who would therefore do but little for themselves.

“Let us then never despair.”

Common enough words, it may be said; Sunday utterances of a place-seeking chaplain, who, in the hope of lawn-sleeves under George III., wrote, on the occasion of George II.'s funeral, that “earth was not pure enough for the deceased king's abode: his only place was heaven.” No matter. They have done good work for once; have delivered to one lost soul

the highest message a man's words can ever convey to his fellows: redemption for the fallen, strength for the weak, hope for all. "Let us then never despair."

Jane walks forth from the inn with limbs that know not their heaviness; mine hostess watching her depart with sagely prophetic shakes of the head. A wedding-ring was on the girl's finger truly, but people may come to no good even with that! She walks down to the quay through rain, now beginning to fall in heavy showers, and heeds it not. Her brain is on fire, her whole moral nature in a state of exaltation. Material conditions of fatigue or wet affect her not.

Arrived with a string of other foot-passengers by the side of the Belgian steamer, she stands for a space, because those about her stand: when her turn comes, files across the gangway like the rest.

"From strength to strength: from perfection to perfection. Let us then never despair." The words lift her to a kind of ecstasy. She repeats them in her heart again and again, as though to repeat them were of itself an act of salvation! And all the time the vessel is getting up its steam fast, the vessel that is to bear her another stage on her journey to Brussels, and she makes no effort—it does not suggest itself to her half-delirious thoughts to make an effort to leave it. "From strength to strength: from perfection to perfection."

"Better go down below, mum, hadn't you?" says a sailor's rough friendly voice. "You're a-getting wet through up here on deck."

“Getting!” Why, her chest and shoulders are wet to the skin already, the sensation, as far as she feels it at all, pleasurable. However, she obeys instantly; directed by the same friendly voice, goes below; then makes her way, guided by the flicker of a lamp through a half-opened door, into the ladies’ cabin. Ladies are ranged around in berths prepared for seasickness; the stewardess sits chatting to a rosy-faced young woman, evidently in her own rank of life, who holds a child in her arms. Jane sinks down on the sofa just within the door, and listens—hears rather, to listen denotes an act of voluntary attention—hears what the two women talk about. They talk dramatically, after the manner of uneducated people, about what “he” said, and “she” said; they enter, unreservedly and aloud, into the details of their own private affairs. At the end of two or three minutes Jane knows that the younger woman is returning home to her husband, who owns some sort of hotel or lodging-house in Ostend, and that her name is Smith. And she is sensible of a certain remote feeling of comfort from the knowledge. The woman’s voice and face are kindly; some faintest clue to human kinship seems given in the fact of knowing her name. If—if this queer sensation of weakness should get worse, one’s head more unsteady, it might be well that there were *some one* near—some pitying Christian woman (not of the upper or visitable classes) to hold out a hand of succour in one’s need!

Creak, creak, go the boards, resounding under

many feet overhead; the wind whistles; the big drops beat against the sky-light.

"We shall have a roughish night of it, I'm afraid, ma'am," observes the younger woman, clasping the child she holds tighter to her breast as she addresses the stewardess.

"Yes, and the tide against us, too," answers the latter, with the equanimity of a human being to whom an extra rough sea only means extra seasick ladies and extra fees to oneself. "But your little maid's a good sailor, Mrs. S."

"Well, yes, bless her! She don't often ail, by sea or by land."

And putting back her shawl with tender hand, the woman reveals to Jane's aching sight . . . Blossy. Not the veritable living Blossy (at this moment, doubtless, asleep and rosy in her cot), but Blossy notwithstanding. To a mother every little child is in some measure hers, and brings her, even more vividly than memory can, into the presence of the one she has left.

"A big girl, Mrs. Smith," remarks the stewardess, looking down critically at the small sleeper. "I doubt but she's too stout for health?"

"Not she," cries the mother quickly. "You should see her shoulders when she stands—as upright! and such a pair of legs! and only three years old next Michaelmas. Smith was all for keeping her home with him. I was called away to poor father sudden, ma'am, as you know, and Smith wanted to keep the child home along of him. But, bless you, I couldn't be happy

and her out of my sight! A young child like that, as I say, they're well to-day and sick to-morrow."

The stewardess shakes her head with the habitual melancholy of her profession: "You may say that, my dear. 'Well to-day, and *gone* to-morrow!' And this summer especial. I never knew so much sickness as there is among the young children this summer."

Jane starts to her feet; she turns abruptly from the sight of the sleeping child, and gropes her way out of the cabin. The words of the sermon spoke to her conscience, as we have seen, but from without—artificially. She kept upon the road to Brussels still. Every fibre of her nature, bodily and mental, is smitten by the women's careless talk; smitten through the instinct which lies at the very root and foundation of all conscience. One blind, mighty hunger—to get back to the child she has abandoned—fills her heart. Blossy's kisses, Blossy's songs and dances, the sweets, the quintessence of her woman's life—what mattered the slights of the world, the censure of narrow brains and dull malice, nay, what mattered Theobald's infidelity, while she had these? And she has forsaken these: has put a barrier between herself and all that to her is life for evermore. Oh, fool! into what black night of hopeless, loveless despair was she not about to drift? *Was?*—ay, for she will turn back yet. What to her is society, or the reception that awaits her from society? She will have Blossy—has done nothing (God be thanked for that!) to forfeit the pressure of Blossy's arms, the touch of Blossy's lips.

Her strength seems to have come back by miracle. She reaches the deck without an effort. All that remains now is, to walk back on shore and to the station, and take the first train that will bear her, no matter how short a stage, upon her journey home.

Home? No, Jane, not so; not thus may we play fast and loose with destiny. She reaches the deck, is conscious of a certain tremulous movement of the vessel; and looking quickly around through the driving rain, sees a gleam of lights, the outline of dark moving objects, on either side. A second longer look conveys to her the whole truth. The steamer at this very moment is passing outward through the narrow mouth of Dover Harbour. Return is impossible!

CHAPTER XXI.

Lord Barty and his Friends.

THE club-gardens at Cowes. Picturesque groups of yachting people in after-dinner dress. Mingled exhalations of Havannah cigars, August flowers, and Cowes mud. Conversation a trifle more animated, perhaps, than the after-dinner conversation of the same people would be in London, but abounding in much the same scintillations of wit and intellect. A foreground group, with whom we have concern—Lord Barty Beaudesert and the guests who, during the last forty-eight hours, have been enjoying his hospitality and the charms of each other's society on board the "Laïs."

It is said, pleasantly, by those who should know them best, their greatest enemies and their greatest friends, that the race of Beaudesert has always consisted, in pretty equal divisions, of knaves and fools. Of the pair of noble brothers who are the race's living representatives, Lord Barty Beaudesert is—not the fool! You need but look into his face to see that. Though, for my part, I hold that knave and fool are convertible terms. No man would be a knave unless he were in some degree a fool; no fool have you ever met who had not in him the potential elements, at least, of knavery.

Lord Barty has the typical "classic" fool's profile of all the Beaudeserts, with the prominent, lacklustre,

Beaunesert eye; and still something which scarcely rises to intellect—the sharp wide-awake look, rather, that you will find in a wiry little fox-terrier—redeems his smooth red face from the absolute Beaunesert vacuity.

Very wide awake indeed is Lord Barty Beaunesert; very well known, and with no snow-white reputation, in betting-rings, billiard-rooms, and all other resorts where the winning and losing of men's money is legitimate business.

And still Lord Barty is a poor man; for the son and brother of a duke, a very poor man indeed.

He keeps a yacht—hires it, rather, captain, crew, and all (nothing in the world is absolutely Lord Barty's own)—on principles of economy. "The cheapest thing going, a yacht," Lord Barty says. "No house-rent, no taxes, no servants. And then you know your outgoing expenses to a shilling."

Lord Barty adds nothing about your incoming revenue; and this to a hospitable yachtsman, fond of loo and chicken-hazard, and blessed with friends of the pigeon-like nature of little Lord Verreker—and, it may be hoped, of this Dundreary fellow Rose is soft about—is not inconsiderable.

The Dundreary fellow Rose is soft about has not, as things at present stand, proved a very lucrative speculation to Lord Barty Beaunesert. Not a man, at any time, whom I would classify as belonging to the genus pigeon is Francis Theobald, although his extreme guilelessness of manner has more than once led

even professional fanciers of those birds astray in their judgment upon him; and during the past few days, ever since he determined, indeed, to "follow up his luck" at The Folly, Theobald has been enjoying fortune unprecedented—the fortune of a man whom all the gods have conspired to ruin.

Last night—'twas a roughish night at sea, as we know; but weather that might cruelly toss a small mail-steamer in the Channel is comparatively unfelt in the smooth land-locked roads off Cowes—last night after the boat-race, there was a dinner, with a little loo, when the ladies left, on board the "Laïs;" and Theobald won everything. Young Lord Verreker fell a victim, naturally. For what end do Lord Verrekers of one-and-twenty exist at all (on board the "Laïs" especially), unless it be to fall victims? But the same fate befell the veterans; the same fate befell Harry Desmond and Lord Barty. No science, no combination of science, could hold its own against the aces and kings of Mr. Theobald.

I repeat it, a most unfavourable speculation has this Dundreary fellow Rose is soft about proved to Lord Barty Beaudesert—*how* unfavourable a one, is being discussed between Colonel Desmond and Lord Barty at this moment; Loo Childers chatting, with the innocent frankness that proved Mr. Smylie's undoing, to foolish young Lord Verreker; Lady Rose and Mr. Theobald talking in low murmurs, on a rustic seat, a little apart from the rest.

When men and women, in real life, not romance,

talk together in this murmuring fashion, I have ascertained, after much close practical observation, that, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the exhaustion of tone is accompanied by a corresponding exhaustion of ideas. You watch some whispered colloquy, every word of which, judging from outward manner, should be fraught with perilous dramatic interest; you listen, and hear wiredrawn monosyllables about the last change in the weather, or the approaching change in bonnets. The interesting murmuring pair have long ago, to the best of their ability, "said everything." Lady Rose has by no means reached this fatal climax in a tender friendship. But Theobald reached it long ago. He is not, as I have often repeated, a ladies' man. With his wife he is never bored; but then Jane is not a lady! Jane, in her ignorance, her originality, her chameleon-like moods of thought and temper, is always more or less amusing. Lady Rose is not amusing in the least, when one has had six or seven days of Lady Rose Golightly. And Theobald dimly suspects—in the inmost recesses of his soul a horrible suspicion is beginning to gain ground—that Lady Rose Golightly, at thirty years of age, is capable of far more constant feelings than was Lady Rose Beaudesert at twenty-two; capable, it may be, of that last resource of worn-out women of the world, a serious passion. But if he were convinced of this, and convinced that he were to be the object of the passion, Mr. Theobald, you may be very sure, would get on board the next steamer that leaves Cowes for the mainland, and bid

Lady Rose Golightly, and every person and thing belonging to her, an eternal good-bye!

The murmurs become more and more languid, and Lady Rose's cunning wastes itself in vain efforts to instil into them some kind of galvanic life. Sprightliness, sentiment, veiled half-reproaches, all fall blankly to the ground. At last, happily, occurs a diversion. A boy in red-and-blue uniform enters the gardens not twenty steps away from where Theobald and his companion are sitting, one of the ominous orange-coloured envelopes we all of us know too well, in his hand.

"Those terrible little telegraph-boys!" says Lady Rose. "I have never been able to see one of them without a shudder since I lost my Coco. Coco was my Maltese, Mr. Theobald. The most beautiful dog in London, and affectionate!—the only creature, I do believe, that ever loved me on earth."

"Case of a dear gazelle," responds Mr. Theobald, sensible that some kind of murmured imbecility is expected of him.

"Case of a dear gazelle, as you say. The poor old love was sickening when I had to leave town, so I gave strict orders to Burton to let me know if he got worse. On the second day after I left I got a telegram. Servants are so cruelly inconsiderate. It would have been just as well, as I *had* gone, to spare me the last sad scene. Two of the first dog-doctors had seen Coco, and there was no hope. I rushed up to town that night, just in time to see him alive. He died in my arms."

"Happy Coco!" observes Theobald, knocking the ashes from the tip of his cigar.

"And, from that day to this, the sight of a telegraph-boy makes me get cold. I received another most distressing shock, I remember, when my poor mother had her last fatal illness. We were in the Highlands, just in the middle of one of the pleasantest shooting-parties. . . . Really, I think there should be a law that some other hired person should be sent on first, to prepare one for the telegraph-boys."

"Or, better still, have some hired person to bear one's distressing shocks for one," observes Theobald, "like the deputy mourners at an Irish funeral."

"Ah, if civilization could only arrive at that!"

Lady Rose sighs and looks pensive. Mr. Theobald leans back on the rustic seat, speculating, perhaps, as to whether civilization will ever allow of tender friendships being done by deputy, too. The messenger comes nearer. One of the club-waiters, to whom he has addressed himself, seems to point among the group we are watching for the person of whom he is in search.

"How glad I am we did not give a definite 'Yes' to Mrs. Dulcimer!" says Lady Rose. Mrs. Dulcimer, a lady of nautical and other reputation, has asked all Cowes to dance on board her yacht to-night; but Lady Rose, mindful of Mr. Theobald's prejudices, has left the question of going open. If her strength allowed—and if dear Mrs. Dulcimer would take so undecided an answer—she would be charmed. But in

this hot weather Lady Rose is such a terribly poor creature; no knowing, till the eleventh hour, what Lady Rose's strength will allow her to do! "We should be quite sure of being bored if we went?"

"Quite sure," Mr. Theobald acquiesces; mentally deciding that they would be tolerably certain of *that* anywhere, and under any circumstances.

And the messenger, with the orange envelope in his hand, approaches nearer.

"Really and truly I believe the telegram is for us," observes Lady Rose, looking over her shoulder with languid interest. "No, for Barty. Barty gets mysterious messages from his horrid jockeys and horse-racing people from morning till night."

But no; the orange envelope is not for Lord Barty Beaudesert. Finger to cap, the boy addresses his lordship, and, by a little nod of his lordship's head, has the rightful object of his search pointed out to him. Another three seconds—another three seconds, the last, of rose-watered boredom, and tender friendship, and Lady Rose Golightly—and the orange envelope is in Francis Theobald's hands.

"Martha Smith, 4, Rue de la Cloche, Ostend, to Francis Theobald, on board the 'Laïs,' Cowes,

"Sir,—A lady named Jane Theobald lies here in my house dangerously ill. A letter she has about her bears your address. Please telegraph instructions, or come without delay."

Theobald starts up to his feet, his face turning to the ghastly corpse-like hue very blonde-complexioned

people do turn when the current of their blood is set suddenly awry. "No bad news from home, I hope?" asks Lady Rose, in her quiet voice, as she watches him. With the selfishness of a thoroughly ignoble passion, it seems to Lady Rose Golightly that any bad news from home for Mr. Theobald must be good news to her.

He does not reply, does not see, hear her. The thought of Jane, of her love for him, of the first fond days of their marriage . . . all that there is yet of good in the man's nature gains mastery over him, in this moment's sharpest agony, and holds him dumb.

"I am really afraid you have had bad news, Mr. Theobald," cries Lady Rose. And as she speaks she rises, gracefully agitated, and stands beside him.

He puts the telegram, without a word of answer or of comment, into her hand.

"Most distressing—and so sudden!" Thus sympathises Lady Rose, not lifting her eyes from the paper. "We must hope, indeed we must hope, that there may be some mistake or exaggeration. So often exaggeration in cases of illness! Would it not be well to telegraph for details?"

But, even as she says this, Theobald, unheeding her, questions the boy about the Portsmouth steamers. Quietly he speaks—death itself could not make Francis Theobald outwardly flurried—but in an odd hoarse voice; Lady Rose can scarcely recognise it as Theobald's; and with no faintest return of colour to his blanched face.

"The steamer, the last steamer to Portsmouth, has not left yet, but the gentleman won't have a moment to lose if he wants to catch it. The boats start sharp in these flood-tides. Trains from Portsmouth? Well, he doesn't know for certain—believes the last steamer from the island runs to catch the mail up."

"Something dreadful is certainly going on," remarks Loo Childers, pausing in her flirtation with Lord Verreker. "Don't you think it might be as human for us to inquire what? Just look at the colour of Mr. Theobald's face."

Lord Verreker, lifting his hand to the foolish lip where one day there may be a moustache, lisps, "Ya—as to be sure; inquire, shall we?" And the pair rise. But by the time they reach Lady Rose (Loo prepared with charming platitudes, adapted to any shade of condolence), Theobald is in the act of leaving.

No human being, not even the faithful friend, Loo Childers, will ever know what were the last words spoken between Lady Golightly and the man who was her lover once. But one trifling circumstance Miss Childers notes and remembers—perhaps may too accurately remember when the faithful friendship shall have gone the way of all mortal alliances. Lady Rose's handkerchief, a dainty perfumed morsel of lace-and-cambric, has fallen to the ground—fell there, doubtless, in the moment of her graceful agitation—and Theobald's heel grinds it into the dust as he

leaves her. A trifling circumstance, of which, Theobald, I am quite sure, is unconscious. But poor Lady Rose—has not Lady Rose eyes to see, and a heart to remember, as well as her friend Loo Childers?

She has more colour in her cheek than usual, more animation in her expression. “Quite a sensational *dénouement*.” Lord Barty and Colonel Desmond have by this time sauntered up, and Lady Rose finds herself in the position of narrator to the whole party. “But so exactly what one might expect! People like Mrs. Theobald cannot even be ill without doing a little theatre. ‘Martha Smith to Francis Theobald’ Oh, thanks,” to Lord Verreker, who restores to her the dust-stained lace-and-cambric. “A lady named Jane Theobald,”—and so on throughout the telegram.

Silence all round; then a low kind of whistle, accompanied by a singularly ill-pleased expression of face on the part of Lord Barty Beaudesert.

“The question that naturally presents itself to an inquiring mind is—what was Mrs. Theobald doing at Ostend?” Loo Childers volunteers the observation.

“The question that presents itself to my mind is—was she there at all?” remarks Lord Barty Beaudesert.

“And to mine, too,” growls Harry Desmond, with a ferocious pull of his thick moustache.

“And—and to mine!” says the little lordling, thinking it savours of worldly wisdom to copy the cynicism of his elders.

“Whether she is, or is not at Ostend, Mr. Theo-

bald has flown to join her," says Lady Rose, carelessly. "Poor man! the haste in which he rushed off to catch the boat was really exemplary."

"Most exemplary, I've no doubt," sneers Lord Barty, looking sulkier and sulkier.

"And you and I may as well be turning our thoughts towards Mrs. Dulcimer, Loo? As the evening is tolerably cool, I suppose we may as well go?"

Loo assents, with a little look of command at Lord Verreker, and the two ladies prepare to start.

"I'll just tell you what I think, Rose," says Lord Barty, unable to smother his ill-humour any longer. "Mr. Theobald is an old friend of yours, and I renewed my acquaintance with him to please you, so I don't want to be unnecessarily severe. But when a man wins the pot of money Theobald won last night, and gets a telegram enabling him to bolt with it, all I can say is, it's a——convenient sort of telegram, and a——shuffling dirty trick for a man to play."

Thus Lord Barty Beaudesert—his finest feelings ruffled by even an apparent want of delicacy or honour on the part of an associate.

"Oh come, Barty, it never does to look too closely into other people's domestic concerns," answers Lady Rose, lightly. "I suppose in all cases of really happy wedlock, husbands and wives understand each other pretty well."

"I should like to know how much of my money the fellow has got in his pocket at this moment," growls Lord Barty.

"I should like," says Loo Childers, "to know what Mrs. Theobald was doing at Ostend!"

"And I," says Lady Rose, with a little well-dissembled yawn, "should like, if possible, to forget the whole subject! We have troubled ourselves about Mr. and Mrs. Theobald's domestic concerns for at least five consecutive minutes.—Come, Loo," putting her hand within her friend's arm, "if we really mean to go to Mrs. Dulcimer's, it is time for us to talk toilettes."

And so the ladies depart. Good-bye, Lady Rose: may you enjoy your ball! May you enjoy the watches of the night—the watches of many another 'dead unhappy' future night—that shall succeed!

CHAPTER XXII.

The Closing Scene.

IN the room of a foreign hotel my story opened; in the room of a foreign lodging-house it comes to an end. A cleanly-furnished little bedroom with nasturtiums twining round the window-sill; an engraving or two from Rubens' pictures on the walls; a narrow bed—with a girl's face resting, awfully white and still and shrunken, upon the pillow.

The window is open, and from her bed Jane can see a square of blue sky, framed round by the glowing orange petals and emerald leaves of nasturtium. The angelus is sounding from some neighbouring church

or convent. A bunch of flowers upon the mantelshelf fill all the sick-room with their faint sweet autumn odour.

Jane lies white, still, shrunken, but painless—no longer racked by fierce tortures in limbs or chest, no longer pursued by delirious horrors of the brain. What has been her disease? What, in three cruel weeks, has brought all that brilliant health and youth of hers to this? The little Flemish doctor, here in Ostend, calls it by one long Latin name; the grand English physician, summoned to consultation from Brussels, by another. It must have originated in great mental excitement; it must have originated in exposure to wet and cold. For, having facts laid before them, 'tis surprising how your really clever doctors will find theories to account for them. The truth would seem to be that Jane Theobald has had nearly twenty years of life, and is to have no more! And, when it comes to this, any technical difference in Latin names really matters slightly to the person most concerned.

Nearly twenty years of life. . . . She lies alone—Theobald, to humour her, having gone or promised to go into the fresh air—and, looking up at the sky and listening to the angelus, thinks for awhile over those bygone twenty years. Then, with the prescience that comes to us with exceeding bodily weakness, comes to us oftenest when prescience is no longer of much practical use, she looks onward to the future.

Distinctly she can see it: Theobald given back to his own class in life; Blossy brought up "as a lady;"

herself forgotten. No, a thousand times, no! Never that. Herself remembered by Theobald as one who loved much, sinned much, died—well, we may say opportunely—and whom he forgave, tended, cherished, with tenderness all beyond her deserts, to the last. But upon this, her hands go to her face, the hot tears start, and, with a pang of bitterness unutterable, Jane realises *how* dear life is, how closely, eagerly she clings to the hope of life yet!

Blossy is well, in London, with Uncle Dick—"perfectly happy and at home," Min's last letter said, "and learning already to play the trombone." It is not because of the child that she yearns for life; she yearns for it—passionately, despite this deathly weakness that assails her—because of Theobald. The child can have no second mother; but Theobald . . . the tears course each other down her cheeks, her wasted frame quivers! Even death itself the jealousy of this poor ignorant soul can transcend.

A hushed step sounds outside; the door opens, shuts, and Theobald comes up to her bed; Theobald, pale, haggard, unshorn; with eyes hollow from much watching; all his dandyism, all his Dundrearyism, gone.

"What, Jenny—tears?" In an instant his arms are round her; with such small strength as she possesses she has lifted herself to his embrace. "So this is the use you make of your liberty, the first time you have been left alone!"

"I know, Theobald, I'm a fool. The bells set me

thinking. I was just—just wondering how Blossy is getting on.”

“By Min’s account Bloss was never happier in her life; but if you would like to have her here?——”

“Oh, no; we are better as we are, alone. I’m glad,”—after a little tired pause this; Jane speaks but few words at a time, and those few faintly—“I’m glad you sent the child to Uncle Dick, poor old fellow!”

“I thought it was what you would have wished, Jenny. Charlotte was very good.” Theobald’s glass goes to his eye, instinctively, at the mention of his sister Charlotte. “When they first heard of your illness, Charlotte telegraphed to propose that she should come and nurse you” (Jane gives a little shudder), “and that the child should go to Anne. But I settled it differently. Indeed, I had already written to Uncle Dick to take her.”

“Is all that long ago, my dear? Have I been long here?”

“You have been here three weeks, Jane: but we needn’t talk about anything that is past now. The past is done with.”

“Very nearly, isn’t it? The past ended for me, I think, when I saw the lights fade away in Dover Harbour. They took me to the cabin, I remember, and I got faint, and Mrs. Smith held my hand; and after that everything seems blank till I woke up here with you. How good it was of you to come over to me so quick, Theobald!”

"Oh, Jane, child, don't let us speak about my goodness!" is Theobald's answer.

And then there is silence.

Since she rallied—since the fever left her, rather, there has been no rallying of strength—Jane will often lie for an hour together supported by Theobald's arms, neither of them speaking. But to-night she seems more restless. Her cheeks during the last minute have got the colour in them again that Theobald dreads. A sort of excitement is in her eyes.

"Raise me a little," she says to him, after a time—"Raise me and hold me up, sitting. I want to see how I look in that glass opposite."

He obeys her with difficulty; how firmly, tenderly, to raise a thing so wasted is not an easy task; and she looks at her own image long and wistfully.

Shrunk though she be from all her fine proportions, her hair cut short to her head, the carnations of her skin turned to waxen paleness, a stranger, seeing Jane for the first time at this moment, would say there was a pretty woman, or the wreck of one. Something sweet, and original, and picturesque, makes her Jane Theobald still, in spite of all that she has lost.

She looks at herself, then round into Theobald's face, and laughs. A poor little ghost of a laugh, yet it does him good to hear it—once more to hear a laugh of any kind from Jane's lips.

"What a hideous scarecrow! Theobald, I am not human."

He answers, as he answers nine out of ten of her remarks by a kiss.

"You wouldn't find it easy to pin roses among my beauteous locks now. I should have to take, like Mrs. Coventry Brown, to tintacks and glue."

"*Should have!*" Oh, the agony of hearing that conditional tense from lips we love! Theobald's heart sinks down again to zero.

"You don't pay me any compliments. You are not like my poor little good Samaritan, Mrs. Smith. Mrs. Smith did her best to cheer me this morning. 'I had a cousin, Mim,'"—though she were dying, Jane must be an actress still: the voice that speaks is Mrs. Smith's—"A cousin, Mim, had the rheumatic fever as bad as you, and lived years after, and never got the use of her limbs, and weak-like in her intellick." Theobald, if I recover, I hope I shan't be 'weak-like in my intellick?'"

"Don't jest, Jane—don't jest; I can't bear to hear it."

He lays her tenderly down upon her pillow, rests his face by hers, and soon Jane feels tears that are not her own upon her cheek.

. . . I have never depicted Francis Theobald in any favourable light. I have shown him to be weak, selfish, indolent; a gambler; not too exemplary a husband—not up to the mark, it may be, if judged only by the world's code of honour. Yet even in this man there must be good. Even Francis Theobald cannot,

surely, be all scum, all froth, inasmuch as he can love and suffer yet!

And make no mistake as to his position. Do not think that Theobald holds Jane to his heart, sorrows over her as a man without hope, "not knowing." Theobald knows all—knows the whole story of Jane's meditated sin against him, painted, in colours black as night, by Jane herself. During the wild days and nights of her fever, her delirious ramblings (scarce a sentence of which but contained his name and Lady Rose's) told him much. With her first return to reason, with the first coherent words she uttered, he knew all. Truth is strong in her as love; looking with her wan eyes into his eyes, both were poured forth to him together. And his answer was—to take her closer than before to his breast, and forgive her. Not altogether what a man of stoic principles would have done, thus placed. But Francis Theobald, we have long known, has no principles worth speaking of. At all events he forgave her. And with this crowning weakness of his weak unballasted life I, for one, am not disposed to quarrel.

"Theobald," says she, softly, after awhile. "There's just one thing I want to talk to you about. I should like to have it out to-night."

"Not to-night, Jenny; to-morrow you will be stronger. You know what the doctors say about your being excited towards evening."

"I know. 'Madame is apt to get excited towards evening,' say you solemnly. 'Then take the greatest

care madame does *not* get excited towards evening,' answer the doctors more solemnly still. However, what I'm 'going to talk about won't excite me a bit. Theobald," holding his hand between both her own, and looking at him, fixedly. "I don't want to die!"

Francis Theobald's glass goes to his eyes. "There's deuced little in this world for any one to want to live for," he remarks, drearily.

"If I was sure—certain—that my death wouldn't be for the best But of course it would set you free . . . and then if ever she gets free, as I dare say people like that can, and——"

"What are you talking of, my poor child?" says Theobald, as Jane falters—falters, but holds his hand tighter and tighter between her own. "'If ever she gets free!' Whom do you mean by 'she'?"

"I mean Lady Rose," cries Jane with a gasp. "Now that I've had courage to say it, I shall be better. Theobald, some day when,—when all this is over, and when Mr. Golightly is got rid of, you will marry her!"

"If Mr. Golightly were got rid of," says Theobald, speaking more in his natural voice than he has spoken for days, "and if Lady Rose had a hundred thousands pounds, and I might marry her next moment, I would—not marry her! I would rather break stones on the road than spend my life with Lady Rose."

"And yet——"

"Jenny, let us have no more 'and yets.' Haven't we agreed that the past is done with? We are to go

back to the old vagabond days, Jane, you and I. I mean to sell Theobalds: I mean that Chalkshire and everything belonging to Chalkshire shall be as though they had never been."

For a moment she is silent. Then a light, that makes her look almost like the Jane Theobald she once was, trembles over all her worn white face.

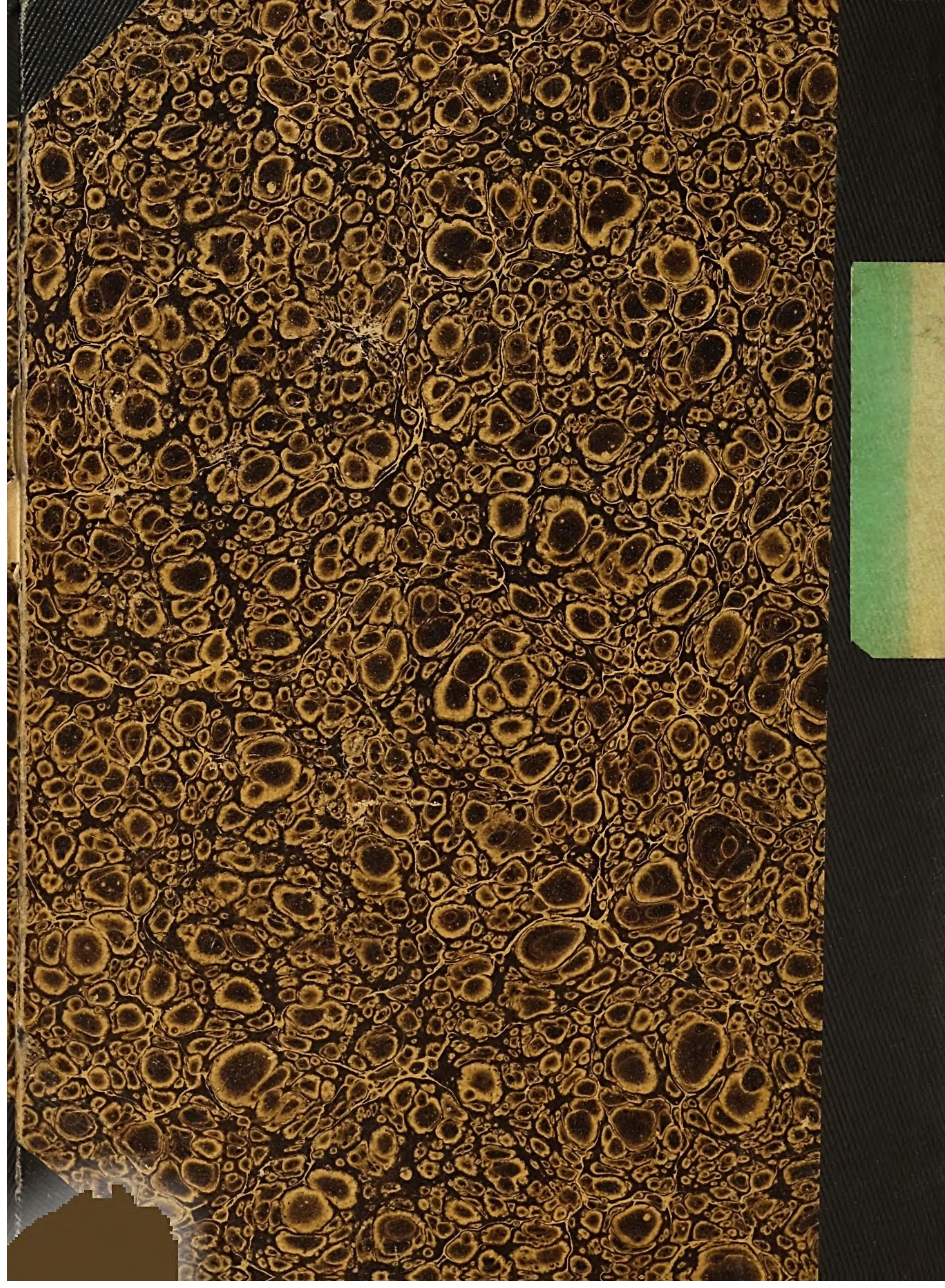
"The old vagabond days—you and me alone, again? Theobald, never mind the doctors! I *can't* die. I don't think I'm a coward. As long as I could hold your hand, I'd go anywhere, in this world or the next. . . . That wouldn't be death! But not alone. . . Oh, my dear, put your arms round me—close. Love me, and I shall live. Love me, Theobald, me alone in the whole world, and I shall cheat the doctors yet!"

* * * *

And she kept her word, Reader; she lives. The men of science found another many-syllabled Latin word for the cause of her miraculous recovery. I think, myself, the four letters L. O. V. E. spell it in simple English. Houseless, vagabond, "unvisited" Jane lives, and is a supremely happy woman at this hour!

THE END.

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Edwards, Annie,

Ought we to visit her?

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